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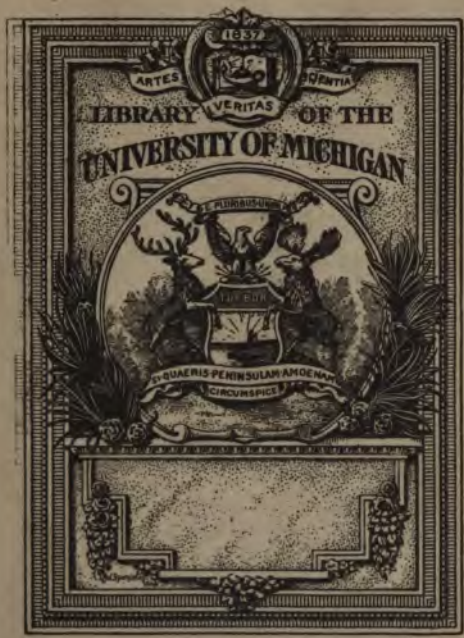
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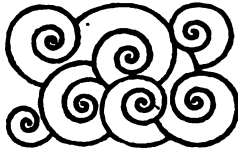
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BOOKS AND PLAYS

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Books and Plays

By Allan Monkhouse

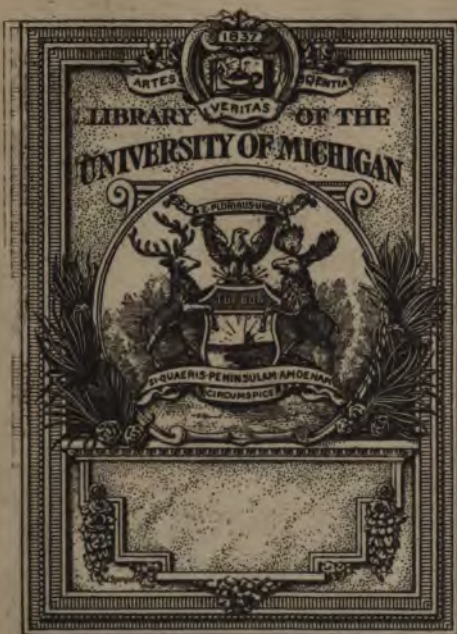


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To L. M.

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2

BOOKS AND PLAYS

from several of the critical journals. Whether this accounts in any measure for its relatively remarkable success or not, it appears to have been the first of Mr Meredith's books to penetrate beyond a very limited circle. The result has been an increased and, perhaps, increasing interest in his productions, several of which had been for some time out of print, and, as Mr Stevenson said, 'sought for on bookstalls like an Aldine.' Now we have them in a cheap and in a cheaper edition, and other signs of popular attention are not wanting. The new journalism knows all about him, he is discussed in the critical weeklies, and if he has not yet attained the honour of the proverbial 'slating' in the *Quarterly*, he has been shown his place—which is not with the novelists it seems—by a distinguished writer in the *National Review*.

At the time when popular attention was directed toward him most of his books were either out of print or little known. Presently some half dozen masterpieces were tumbled upon the market, and they have proved a little difficult to digest. They are not like anything to which we were accustomed, for Mr Meredith has steadily pursued his own ideal, disregarding all temptations to aim at a superficial success.

His style shows few signs of conformity to any accepted standard, and, though his human sympathy is wide and deep, he has not scrupled to express his friendly contempt for the judgment of the 'British Public.' Yet the British Public learns its lesson even though it learns it by rote. It can show tolerance and simulate respect towards Browning, and there are some striking points of resemblance between him and Mr Meredith. They are masters of the indirect, the presentation by side-lights, inferences and hints, a rare and curious trait in writers so intense and earnest. Both are enemies of sentimentalisms and scourgers of cants and shams. Fortified by far different creeds, they front alike inevitable evil and misfortune with stout hearts, declaring that this is yet a world in which wisdom is on the side of joy and not of grief. There is, too, the obvious analogy that their strong and wilful personalities sometimes find perverse and obscure expression, and if Mr Meredith has not yet the advantage of a society to elucidate his meaning it is not the fault of his poems, which offer extraordinary opportunities for floundering. Between the novels and the poems there is an interesting race for fame, and perhaps it is the latest fashion to praise the

poems at the expense of the novels. Readers of poetry have at least the intention to seek for intellectual beauty, and are usually more critical and discerning than the average of novel readers, whose demand is for something light and amusing coupled with the current morality. For this reason the poems might be expected to have a relatively wider acceptance, though their bibliography hardly bears out such a conclusion. But neither are likely to become widely popular. A popular artist who is also a great artist is not popular by virtue of his art; Tennyson's sentiment has penetrated beyond his poetry; the farce and melodrama of Dickens have attracted more than that humour and pathos which a younger generation is beginning to find antiquated; Sir John Millais's pretty pictures have made more friends than his beautiful ones; and Shakespeare himself, if he is popular, which is, perhaps, an unverified assumption, owes it to such accidental circumstances as the force of tradition, the insistence of critics, our national vanity, and the fact that, apart from their greater qualities, several of his plays may be distorted into effective entertainments.

Mr Meredith has none of these secondary

qualifications which help to make a supporting public outside the circle of genuine appreciation. Whether he could have achieved a great popular success or not, he has never tried for it. He must be taken on his own terms. He will not vulgarise his art to obtain an audience; and as the mountain shows no signs of coming to Mahomet, Mahomet has begun to stir in the direction of the mountain. To them who read novels as the easiest form of brain rest, he is impracticable and preposterous. His persistent habit of putting things in an unusual way, for the purpose of provoking ideas, when we have been accustomed to cheat our brains with phrases, results, occasionally, in something of a hit or miss style, and though the successes enormously outnumber the failures, these give plausible opportunities to the zealous fault-finder, who is an altogether different person from the conscientious critic. Nor is he possessed with that touching devotion to our good Anglo-Saxon, which prefers that a man should fail to express his meaning, with a little word, rather than resort to the hated polysyllable. Then he is a professed psychologist, with something of a professional's taste for curious cases. He has a turn for the fantastical, and his

creatures—truly children of his brain—are possessed, one and all, with 'thick coming fancies.' Metaphors, analogies, similes, epigrams, chase one another through his pages. It may savour of a reproach, to say that he constantly aims at wit, but I remember that Charles Lamb has said (I don't know whether Lamb really said it, but I conform gladly to the custom that gives him all wandering good things that are good enough), that this is, at least, better than aiming at dulness. Wit, indeed, is assumed to be the common attribute of the human race, and it may be admitted that his manifestation of it is, sometimes, brilliantly inappropriate. He has such an abundance of good things to say, that when he has worked off all that can be held by introduction and digression, a few remain for forcible distribution among his characters. And so difficult and elusive are many of these good things that it seems as if Mr Meredith, who has faith in the progress of the race, is preparing for a sharper-witted posterity. If these suggestions appear flippant I can only say that a hasty perusal of one of these novels has sometimes a bewildering effect on a casual reader of this generation. 'They are magnificent, but they are not novels,' such an one may exclaim, or he

will grant that there is a world of matter, but without form and void. If it is acknowledged that the novel is the most potent and highly-organised of modern literary forms, careful study is not an unreasonable demand, and careful study will do much to remove these prejudices. It will be found that order is gradually evolved from seeming chaos; that every incident, every character, and every comment, has its value in forwarding the action or completing the picture. We live in a critical age, and one reason for the decline of the drama, before the novel, is probably that the later form is not only a representation of life, but gives opportunity for direct criticism of it. Like all his fellows Mr Meredith is not constantly dramatic—his own personality is intruded, from time to time, to deliver a kind of explanatory lecture that is neither unwelcome nor unnecessary. For these expressions are full of ripe wisdom and genial humour and flowering fancy. Without them we could never see every side of the complex and changing figures that they illumine. The recent romantic revival has tended to discourage analytic processes, and, perhaps, it is judicious to abstain from analysis of some of the popular figures of contemporary romance, but he has never been able to perceive,

in life, the material for a flowing narrative. He writes, as history is written now, with copious notes, recognising the endless complications, qualifications, reflections that prevent smooth or rapid progress, but which give us the truth or bring us nearer to it at last.

A friendly critic has yielded to the temptation of epigram so far as to declare that Mr Meredith might have been Molière if he had not tried to be Congreve, and his bouts of wit do occasionally remind us of a kind of glorified drawing-room game such as Congreve might have delighted in. But between their wit in its most characteristic expression there is a difference in kind. 'The great art of Congreve is especially shown in this,' says Lamb, 'that he has entirely excluded from his scenes—some little generousities on the part of Angelica perhaps excepted—not only anything like a faultless character, but any pretensions to goodness or good feelings whatsoever.' The wit that flourishes in such a soil can have little in common with that which thus expresses its ideal—'The well of true wit is truth itself, the gathering of the precious drops of right reason, wisdom's lightning,' and whose function is 'to strike roots in the mind, the Hesperides of good things.' No better instance of this kind of

wit occurs to me than Jenny Denham's reply to Beauchamp, when he says of the election he has lost—"It's only a skirmish lost, and that counts for nothing in a battle without end; it must be incessant." "But does incessant battling keep the intellect clear?" was her memorable answer. This is not in the style of the dexterous Congreve. Yet Mr Meredith's wit does not aim to maintain a pedantic standard. He takes a pleasure in mental gymnastics that is not invariably shared by the reader. 'Diana of the Crossways' is probably the wittiest novel in the language. Its good things are pressed down and running over. Diana's retort to Mrs Cramborne Wathin is something to be thankful for:—"Our life below is short," she said, to which Diana tacitly assented. "We have our little terms, Mrs Warwick, it is soon over. On the other hand, the platitudes concerning it are eternal." Again, when Lord and Lady Esquart had been kept awake by the strange performances of the bells in a Swiss village, they are asked by Diana "what they had talked of during the night?" "You, my dear, partly," said Lady Esquart.—"For an opiate?"—"An invocation of the morning," said Dacier. Of a very different kind from such splendidly luminous wit is this: "Women are a blank to

men, I believe," said Whitmonby, and Westlake said—"Traces of a singular scrawl have been observed when they were held in close proximity to the fire." For an instance of Mr Meredith's peculiarly felicitous employment of irony, we must hear what Mrs Wathin says of her ideal young woman:—"She does not pretend to wit. To my thinking, depth of sentiment is a far more feminine accomplishment." Yet another example, and this is his own:—"When we have satisfied English sentiment our task is done in every branch of art, I hear, and it will account to posterity for the condition of the branches.'

It is, I suppose, almost a commonplace of comparative criticism that the novels of England and of France offer this remarkable distinction, that while we have usually and characteristically been ready to sacrifice truth to what we call decency, they have, in great measure, devoted themselves to the study and magnification of one class of physical phenomena and its social conditions, to which they have assigned the position and dedicated the powers due to universal truth. Mr Meredith has named these opposite schools or tendencies, the 'rose-pink' and the 'dirty-drab.' But besides the systems that treat of man as a bourgeois convention and as a senti-

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mental animal (though to do them justice they have sometimes omitted the sentiment), there is that whose subject for good or evil is the mind and spirit of man, and which, recognising and rejoicing in the ties that bind him to the earth, can yet permit the declaration that ideas 'are actually the motives of men in a greater degree than their appetites.' In his essay on Balzac, Mr Henry James has said—'When we approach Thackeray and George Eliot, George Sand and Turgeneff, it is into the conscience and the mind that we enter, and we think of these writers primarily as great consciences and great minds. When we approach Balzac we seem to enter into a great temperament—a prodigious nature.' He says again—'A magnificent action with him is not an action which is remarkable for its high motive, but an action with a great force of will or of desire behind it, which throws it into striking and monumental relief. It may be a magnificent sacrifice, a magnificent devotion, a magnificent act of faith; but the presumption is that it will be a magnificent lie, a magnificent murder, or a magnificent adultery.' I do not presume to say how far these passages are true of Balzac, or, to bring it nearer home, in what limited and qualified sense they are true

of our own Dickens, between whom and Balzac the differences are, as Mr James says, chiefly of race. They are quoted because they express and distinguish, so much better than I can do, the primary characteristic of Mr Meredith's genius. He, too, is a great conscience and a great mind, and the momentous questions of conduct and of life that he raises are referred to this arbitrament. They whom he thinks worthy of the post of honour and danger—his heroes and heroines—can count upon no pleasantly variegated course of successful adventure. What they do is not of such account as what they are and what they may become. To him as to us they are very real. He knows them well, and he seeks to know them better. He plays upon them from the lowest note to the top of their compass. He plucks out the heart of their mystery. They must pass through a fiery ordeal in which no fair seeming dross avails. He has love for them, but no mercy. Have they a weakness? he exposes it; a shallowness? he sounds it. He does not shrink from the supreme test—to lay upon them a burden greater than they can bear. 'Our souls,' he says, 'if flame of a soul shall have come in the agony of flesh, are beyond the baser mischances.'

‘The philosopher,’ who as he humorously says, ‘fathers his dulness on me,’ ‘bids us to see that we are not so pretty as rose-pink, not so repulsive as dirty-drab; and that, instead of everlastingly shifting those barren aspects, the sight of ourselves is wholesome, bearable, fructifying, finally a delight.’ ‘And how do you know that you have reached to philosophy? You touch her skirts when you share her hatred of the sham decent, her derision of sentimentalism.’

It is said that when Turgenieff was dying he sent to his greatest rival a message begging him to return to the exercise of the art that he had deserted. To those who believe in Mr Meredith’s unselfish devotion to that art, his reproach to Thackeray has something of a kindred pathos. ‘A great modern writer,’ he says, ‘of clearest eye and head, now departed, capable in activity of presenting thoughtful women, thinking men, groaned over his puppetry—that he dared not animate them, flesh though they were, with the fires of positive brainstuff. He could have done it, and he is of the departed! Had he dared he would (for he was Titan enough) have raised the art in dignity on a level with history.’

But if it is the mental and moral side of life that seems to Mr Meredith to be of preeminent

importance, he has approached it in no narrow or sectarian spirit. The large charity of humour gives breadth and unity to his view. He has the insight and catholicity of a poet, disdaining neither science nor romance. Comedy, he pronounces to be our means of reading swiftly and comprehensively. 'She it is who proposes the correction of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dullness, and the vestiges of rawness and grossness to be found among us. She is the ultimate civiliser, the polisher, a sweet cook. If she watches over sentimentalism with a birch rod, she is not opposed to romance. You may love, and warmly love, so long as you are honest. Do not offend reason.' Again, he says of romance: 'The young who avoid that region escape the title of fool at the cost of a celestial crown.' Of poetry: 'Those who have souls meet their brothers there.' Yet though much of his philosophy of life may be deduced from the novels it is to the poems that we must turn for a complete understanding of his view of the relation of man to nature.

The subject of Mr Meredith's style is not to be approached with a light heart for it is variously estimated as his chief virtue and as his damning defect.

Though a style may be acquired that shall have great effect in the regulation and control of ideas, these come first in the natural order, and that style is the best which gives them full and proper expression. Swift is a great master of style, because, as Landor says, 'No one ever had such a power of saying forcibly and completely what he meant to say.' And as it would have been impossible for the author of 'Sartor Resartus' to unburden himself in the style of 'The Vicar of Wakefield,' so it is idle to expect that 'The Egoist' could be expressed in terms of 'Tom Jones.' Mr Meredith is himself an acute critic, and through the medium of Mr Barrett, in 'Sandra Belloni,' has given us a view, that we may perhaps venture to accept as in some measure his view of individualism in literature. I have condensed the following passage: 'The point to be considered is whether fiction demands a perfectly smooth surface. Undoubtedly a scientific work does, and a philosophic treatise should. When we ask for facts simply, we feel the intrusion of a style. Of fiction it is part. In the one case, the classical robe, in the other, any mediæval phantasy of clothing. We are still fighting against the Puritan element in literature as elsewhere.

And more than this, our language is not rich in subtleties for prose. A writer who is not servile, and has insight, must coin from his own mint. In poetry, we are rich enough; but in prose also we owe everything to licence our poets have taken in the teeth of critics. Our simplest prose style is nearer to poetry with us, for this reason, that the poets have made it. Read French poetry. With the first couplet the sails are full, and you have left the shores of prose far behind. An imaginative Englishman, pen in hand, is the cadet and vagabond of the family, an exploring adventurer; whereas, to a Frenchman, it all comes inherited, like a well-filled purse. The audacity of the French mind, and the French habit of quick social intercourse, have made them nationally far richer in language. Let me add, individually, as much poorer. Read their stereotyped descriptions. They all say the same things. They have one big Gallic trumpet. Wonderfully eloquent: we feel that: but the person does not speak.'

Whatever may be said of Mr Meredith's style—and it has sometimes been thought an ill-favoured thing—it is assuredly his own. He is not content to be the heir of the ages, but

insists on bringing his own contribution. His rapacious mind makes every thought his own and dresses it in his livery. He will have none of the facile phrases that have done duty so often as its expression. It is perhaps his misfortune that he is not merely a man of genius, but a very clever man of genius. He is in the main stream of humanity and he trims his sail to every breeze. The eternal is good with him and so is the particular. Condensation, too, is especially a characteristic of his style. A prodigal in ideas he is a niggard in words, and gives us 'infinite riches in a little room.' 'The art of the pen is to arouse the inward vision,' he says, and 'our flying minds cannot contain a protracted description.' So, by the cultivation of essential wit, he helps us forward in the struggle against the physical limits of life. The process of compression gives a cycle of Cathay in the fifty years of Europe, and we can conceive almost an immortality of contraction.

Mr Meredith's use of metaphor and analogy, his accumulations, indications, inferences are not an idle nor a barren habit. Knowledge comes by accumulation and inference. It is the way of life. He seeks by any means and every means to penetrate and refine, to get

closer to his subject, to obtain a perfect quality of expression, a gathering of more delicate factors. To me it seems that his object is achieved—that he has reached a degree of expression more exact and more profound than any novelist has reached before him. He has combined closest observation with poetical description. If at his occasional worst he is crabbed, mannered, obscure, polysyllabic, it may be a warning to those critics who find him an easy prey, whose faculty of selection is so unerring that it would be to them but a holiday task to prove Landor incoherent or Swift waterish, to remember of Diana that 'a fit of angry cynicism now and then set her composing phrases as baits for the critics to quote, condemnatory of the attractiveness of the work.' Perhaps Mr Meredith has a definitive edition of his works in reserve without the few little excrescences and eccentricities that give colour to the adverse estimate of finickin pedantry. But cynicism—the refuge of the disillusioned sentimentalist—is not for him. If he has from time to time protested against the judgments and satirised the aims of the world that overlooked him, he has kept his serene and healthy nature undefiled by any taint of envy of the

deserved successes of his peers. Genius unrecognised tends towards pessimism or self-assertion. He did not abandon his hope in humanity because his novels were not read as they ought to have been, and if he was not content to acquiesce in the verdict that would have relegated him to that dusty nook where obscure eccentrics pine for the light of popular favour, some allowance may perhaps be made for the respect which it is natural for him to feel toward what he calls 'that acute and honourable minority which consents to be thwacked with aphorisms and sentences and a fantastic delivery of the verities,' and which has maintained through evil and good report that his first novel gained for him a position, since strengthened and secured, second to none of his predecessors or contemporaries in English fiction.

According to *Men of the Time* Mr Meredith was born 'about 1828.' As in the case of other immortals there seems to have been some uncertainty about the event—or perhaps this vagueness is owing merely to an early immunity from interviewers. His first publication was a volume of poems in 1851 which was soon followed by 'The Shaving of Shagpat,' an Arabian

entertainment, which is a tremendous medley of extravagant genius, and 'Farina,' the fanciful setting of an old German legend. In these an exuberant imagination was allowed free play, and it might be a nice consideration how far a mind naturally impatient of restraint has gained or lost by such initial exercises.

In 1859, being then about thirty years of age, Mr Meredith published 'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,' perhaps the most widely admired of his works. Novelists are later than poets in attaining maturity, and 'Richard Feverel' is so elaborate and solid a work that it is difficult to believe it to be a first essay in this form. The first edition, however, which, like all Mr Meredith's early editions, is at a premium, is said to be a much cruder performance than the later revised versions. Whether 'Richard Feverel' is the best of his novels or not, it contains much of his finest quality. He has studied the genius boy with kindly attention, and it has never failed to yield the joke that each one carries at the centre of his being. Richard and Ripton, the first of that gallant and entertaining company, of which Crossjay, and Temple, and Harry Richmond, and Nevil Beauchamp are worthy members, make us wish, while we

are with them, that their author could spare time from graver labours to give us once for all that epic of boyhood of which he, and he only, is capable. But if it is hard to part with the Bantam and Dame Bakewell, and the other accessories to Richard's early exploits, we are presently consoled by some of the very prettiest lovemaking in literature. Richard and Lucy are our modern Ferdinand and Miranda, whose fortunes are wrecked by a blind and infatuated Prospero. A Prospero whom the winds and waves do not obey, whose belief in his spells is unshaken, and whose attitude of command is unrelaxed till the peremptory awakening of calamity is at once a comic and a tragic spectacle. When Sir Austin speaks to Mr Thompson of Ripton, and says, "Do you establish yourself in a radiatory centre of intuition? Do you base your watchfulness on so thorough an acquaintance with his character, so perfect a knowledge of the instrument, that all its movements—even the eccentric ones—are anticipated by you, and provided for?" and Mr Thompson replies that "he was afraid he could not affirm that much though he was happily enabled to say that Ripton had borne an extremely good character

at school," we feel that we are in the region of pure comedy. But Sir Austin is essentially a tragic character, and if there is some justice in the objection that the story's strange and pitiful ending is not inevitable as a tragic issue should be, it is, I think, because his position is not sufficiently enforced. He is a man of high intelligence and noble aims, whose fatal pedantry brings ruin and misery upon the son he loves. Of Richard's own contribution to the calamitous tangle in his neglectful absence from his wife, it is not easy to speak. It is inexplicable to the gross and literal sense of the dogged school of criticism, but we may take comfort in remembering that other inconsequent writer who taught us that 'cause and will and strength and means' may be a prelude with no succeeding act, and who has left unanswered and unanswerable the portentous question :—

' Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body? '

The humour of 'Richard Feverel' is constant in operation and eminent in quality. It is sometimes snatched from the very jaws of tragedy, as in those most daring and delightful

episodes, the historical readings of the infatuated and bewildered Lord Mountfalcon. It gives us a wretched dyspeptic engaged on a history of Fairy Mythology and a 'wise youth,' himself a humourist, whose philosophy is cunningly undermined by his contemptuous author. Of its pathos I will only say that the last chapter is one of the most moving things in our literature.

I must confess that to me 'Evan Harrington' is the least worthy of Mr Meredith's novels. The Countess de Saldar is not of the race of these great comic characters that justify themselves under any conditions. Never elsewhere has her author concerned himself so far with the presentation of a person essentially vulgar. She is an ordinary person in an extraordinary position, and 'Evan Harrington' is a comedy of circumstance rather than of character. The tenacity of an adventuress is not the most fruitful of themes for the creator of Richmond Roy and Sir Willoughby Patterne. She is a great success, but a success of a lower order. Rose and Evan are a delightful pair of lovers, Lady Jocelyn is excellent, and Mrs Harrington, possibly the very best of minor woman characters, one of Mr Meredith's strongest points. Mr Raikes is, perhaps, dangerously near the line which separates

the fantastical from the preposterous, but with old Tom Cogglesby, who seems to have strayed from Dickens's collection, he contributes some very curious and characteristic humour.

No better example of Mr Meredith's power in simple, passionate narrative can be chosen than Emilia's story of her early life in the book that has been re-named 'Sandra Belloni.' "Such a touch on the violin as my father has, you never heard. You feel yourself from top to toe when my father plays. I feel as if I breathed music like air. One day came news from Italy, all in the newspaper, of my father's friends and old companions shot and murdered by the Austrians. He read it in the evening, after we had had a quiet day. I thought he did not mind it much, for he read it out to us quite quietly; and then he made me sit on his knee and read it out. I cried with rage, and he called to me 'Sandra! Peace!' and began walking up and down the room, while my mother got the bread and cheese and spread it on the table, for we were beginning to be richer. I saw my father take out his violin. He put it on the cloth and looked at it. Then he took it up, and laid his chin on it like a man full of love, and drew the bow across just once. He whirled away the

bow and knocked down our candle, and in the darkness I heard something snap and break with a hollow sound. When I could see, he had broken it, the neck from the body—the dear old violin! I could cry still. I—I was too late to save it. I saw it broken, and the empty belly, and the loose strings! It was murdering a spirit—that was! My father sat in a corner one whole week, moping like such an old man! I was nearly dead with my mother's voice. By-and-by we were all silent, for there was nothing to eat." Here, to use a famous phrase, 'Nature takes the pen from him and writes.' I presume that no fault will be found with this even by the literary Puritan. Emilia subsequently kept her parents upon a potato diet, in order that she might save money for her singing lessons—an altogether delightful circumstance, though perhaps startling to those who would require a heroine to follow the usual sympathetic course. She is a natural young woman, a living refutation of the doctrine of original sin, and an assurance of her author's belief and hope in human nature. She does not comprehend evil, but instinctively abhors it. Without superficial cleverness, she penetrates to essentials. She has something of the primal gratitude and devotion

of an animal. Among the highly-organised ladies of Brookfield, she moves like a young panther among domestic cats. These civilised young persons who are, if less amusing, on a higher plane of comedy than the Countess de Saldar, have some reason to complain of the fate that confronts them with nature in the phenomenal forms of Emilia and Mrs Chump, by whom their distinctions, their reserves, their ideals, are roughly broken down and inexorably scattered. In Wilfred, too, we have a careful and relentless study of one who tries to make sentiment do the work of passion, 'passion which,' we are told with profound insight, 'may tug against common sense, but is never in a great nature divorced from it.' There is not much common sense in Wilfred's vagaries, which, commented upon in most fanciful fashion, are exceedingly good reading for the confirmed Meredithian. The uninitiated may be more confidently recommended to the life-like and grotesque Mr Pericles, to that irresistible Irish-woman, Mrs Chump, or to Mr Pole, a really notable instance of a commonplace person raised to first rate interest by the humour, force, and truth of his presentation.

If diversity of opinion as to Mr Meredith's

masterpiece is limited only by the number of his books, there can be little doubt in assigning to 'Rhoda Fleming' a place among the highest. Less rich and various than some of its rivals, it is of singular intensity and unmatched power. In those marvellous passages where Dahlia defies all laws of God or bonds of man that keep her from her lover, the sharp note of tragedy is struck with a strong and sure hand. Some of her phrases ring in the memory like great Shakesperean lines. Opposed to this creature of frenzied passion is her patient depressed father, a man of narrow mind and inflexible principles. 'This world has been too many for me,' said Mr Tulliver, and Farmer Fleming, too, has been worsted in the conflict with that redoubtable adversary. It is in these contrasted figures of father and daughter that the peculiar quality of the drama is displayed, but Rhoda is a noble example of those reliable women whose lives are a refutation of the stupid calumny that attaches the vices of fickleness and faintness to their sex, and to name one more where many are worthy of full and adequate discussion, Mrs Sumfit is in her degree a perfect and beautiful creation.

I understand that there is a class of orderly and sedate minds to which 'Vittoria' is a dull

and confused narrative of improbable events. Such was the impression recorded some time ago by an American critic who, strange to say, admired Mr Meredith heartily in the main. It is, indeed, of almost bewildering motion and variety, and without it a great region of its author's genius would remain imperfectly explored. It has in the highest degree the quality of dramatic picturesqueness, which may be illustrated by two short connected passages from the scene at the opera when the Austrians occupied the Countess Ammiani's box 'Her face had the unalterable composure of a painted head upon an old canvas. The General persisted in tendering excuses. She replied, "It is best, when one is too weak to resist, to submit to an outrage quietly."' Ammiani saw the apparition of Captain Weisspriess in his mother's box. He forgot her injunction, and hurried to her side, leaving the doors open. His passion of anger spurned her admonishing grasp of his arm, and with his glove he smote the Austrian officer on the face. Weisspriess plucked his sword out; the house rose; there was a moment like that of a wild beast's show of teeth. It passed.'

The whole incident of the opera is one of the finest examples of Mr Meredith's faculty for

conveying the tone and feeling of a scene, the incompleteness and confusion of life. (1)

'Vittoria' is the crowning achievement of prose romance. It is vitalised and exalted by that passion for Italy and Italian freedom that has inspired so many of England's best. The manifestation of this passion is its distinguishing feature. It is serene and beneficent in Vittoria, generous in Powys, austere in the Countess Ammiani, cunning in Barto Rizzo, fanatical in the Guidascarpi. Even the noble character of Vittoria, stronger and deeper than when we knew her as Emilia, which gives coherence to the story and which dominates the strange figures that surround her, scarcely holds our imagination as do Angelo and Rinaldo, Barto Rizzo's wife, and the Countess Ammiani—tragic actors in the drama of a nation.

'The Adventures of Harry Richmond' is Mr Meredith's only essay in the autobiographical form, and it is well that he has given us this if only for the sake of those most charming of childish reminiscences which change with delicate gradations through the distincter recollections of boyhood to the recorded experience of the man. The early part of the book—before the moral complications set in—is what I would

respectfully advance as a proof of its author's strength in picturesque narrative. The school-days, the flight with the gipsy-girl, those gallant toppers, Captain Bulsted and Squire Greg, the fog and the fire in London, the barque *Priscilla* and her skipper, the inimitable Captain Jasper Welch, the entrance into the beautiful German land, and the sensational discovery of Harry's father, form a magnificent series of scenes and pictures. They are preliminary to the chief business of the story, the development of one of the most individual products of English fiction. Readers of 'Evan Harrington' who are able to feel but a qualified admiration for its principal character can hardly fail to be struck with the possibilities in such a personage as the grandiose tailor whose death is the first incident in the story, and who looms portentous throughout its course. But the Great Mel is but a shadow of the brilliant figure in which the fantastic side of Mr Meredith's genius has found its full and perfect expression. If Sir Willoughby Patterne is his greatest contribution to classical, or rather to typical comedy, Richmond Roy is the most notable instance of an absolute creation. Perhaps his nearest affinities are such psycho-

logical curiosities as Turgenieff's Dimitri Roudine or Mr Henry James's Roderick Hudson. I can only refer to Squire Beltham, the undegenerate descendant of Squire Western, with a pathos all his own, and to the two heroines Janet and Ottilia, the first staunch and tender-hearted, to whom a promise is a sacred thing, and the other, one of that rare order of women in which feelings are subordinated to principles.

Mr Meredith warns us not to expect a plot in 'Beauchamp's Career,' for if he had one it would be useless to attempt to persuade his characters to conform to it. Like Frankenstein's monster, they would escape from the control of their creator and make for awkward places outside the prescribed bounds. But if there is no plot there is, at any rate, that best kind of construction, which is evolution tempered by a not too obtrusive special Providence. The hero is actually the centre and mainspring of the drama, his actions are the inevitable outcome of his character and position, and the men and women by whom he is surrounded are developed and combined in their relations to him. He is the touchstone by which they are tried and judged, for here, as elsewhere, there is no escaping the moral estimate. It is a proof

of constructive ability that the crucial scene between Renée and Beauchamp is reinforced in interest and importance by every preceding episode, and cannot be fully appreciated without a present remembrance, not only of the morning on the Adriatic and the adventure of the boat, but of all his relations to Cecilia, to Everard Romfrey, to Dr Shrapnel and, indeed, to all his world.

The aristocratic radical is not a new type, and may be made a very dreary personage. Nevil Beauchamp has something of the spirit of the political Shelley. He is one of those militant heroes who cannot be persuaded to endure what is wrong, or to see in expediency a tolerable substitute for right. We learn that, as a boy, he 'talked of his indignation nightly to his pretty partners, at balls'—the cause being no less than international—and that 'he loved his country, and for another and a broader love, growing out of his first passion, fought it.' This political fight is conducted under social conditions that might daunt any man. He alienates his friends, he quarrels with the uncle on whom he is dependent, he is surrounded by misunderstandings and misjudgments. But he clings fast to his faith in working and fighting—a faith that one

only has power to shake. Renée, 'a brunette of the fine lineaments of the good blood of France,' is the most finely wrought of Mr Meredith's women. We are sometimes told that it is not sufficient in literary matters to have a faith—we must have a reason, and Mr Coventry Patmore has declared that 'there already exists in the writings and sayings of Aristotle, Hegel, Lessing, Goethe and others, the greater part of the materials necessary for the formation of a body of institutes of art which would supersede and extinguish nearly all the desultory chatter which now passes for criticism.' When these institutes are selected and approved, and critics are agreed upon a code that will determine authoritatively and arithmetically the value of artistic products, we shall no longer have an excuse for a preference unexplained. Our heroines of romance will be duly measured and docketed; and as their sisters in real life are estimated by their conformity to or divergence from a standard of morals and manners strangely compounded of nature and convention, so will they be referred for judgment and correction to the accepted code of literary positivism. Meanwhile, I fear that I cannot render sound reasons for my admiration of Renée. Her attraction is too subtle to be ex-

pressed by any feeble epitome of mine. Her perfect distinction and incomparable charm elude criticism and defy analysis. The position of a runaway wife rejected by her lover is a hard one to support with dignity, nor, when it is the lover who has changed his mind, does his seem a part in which much credit may be gained. Yet this situation is chosen for the crowning trial of each, and never, it seems to me, have the relations of social man and woman been treated with a wiser charity, never have they been touched by a stronger or a tenderer hand.

'Beauchamp's Career' is singularly rich in character. Even Renée does not obliterate her rivals, and Everard Romfrey, 'in mind a mediæval baron,' and concerning whom we are told that 'the conversation he delighted in most might have been going in any century since the Conquest,' is a portrait as faithful and superb as Thackeray's Lord Steyne himself. Rosamond Culling, Dr Shrapnel, Lord Palmet, Colonel Halkett, with many others that are not less artistically complete, because they are carefully subordinated, are wholly and admirably successful. It is a political novel, and its comments on the temporary and the essential conditions of our life are worth many tons of blue books and

reports of partisan speeches. With the impartiality of great art it gives us hope for democracy, while it shows that no finer race exists than the English aristocracy. In humour and pathos, in dialogue and incident, in description and romance, it touches its author's highest mark. It is more than curious, it is bewildering that it has received so little attention. Even now, when Mr Meredith is in vogue, there seems to be something assertive in naming it as one of the masterpieces of English literature.

One of the most appreciative of critics has declared that 'The Egoist' is 'on a pinnacle apart among novels, and marks the writer for one of the breed of Shakespeare and Molière.' The counter blast came when a man of letters no less distinguished classed these novels—so crammed with movement, thought, and life—as 'anæmic,' and said that, 'Speaking in sober literalness, and with due attention to the force and value of words, my impression of 'The Egoist' is that it is the most entirely wearisome book purporting to be a novel that I ever toiled through in my life.' These contrasted opinions or impressions admit of no compromise; one or the other is absurd. Sir Willoughby may, it seems, be found 'soporific' and Clara Middleton 'unrealisable.' To

some of us Clara is more than realisable: she is exquisitely and beautifully true, and Willoughby is a great type who yields to comedy his last and finest fruits when he is eager to make any sacrifice of honour or of substance to keep up appearances before two or three old women whom he despises. The fact is that 'The Egoist' is a book to be enjoyed by those who have an appreciable infusion of its hero's nature. This consideration may be offered as a consolation to those who do not enjoy it. Sir Willoughby should be realised sympathetically. 'I am what I am,' he says, and he might have added—

'And they who level
At my abuses reckon up their own.'

Few men can read of him without at least a slight feeling of uneasiness, so many are the touches of nature that reveal our kinship to him. But he must not be taken too earnestly. He must not be hated, or all the fine aroma of the comedy is lost. We know that Clara is safe—it would be no comedy, if she were not; and knowing this, we may watch his evolutions peacefully. Such a character might be treated tragically, as in that indication of a mediæval Willoughby in Browning's 'My Last

Duchess,' where too is the ill-fated prototype of the more fortunate Clara, whose happy union with Vernon Whitford, that fine example of the man who can 'plod on and still keep the passion fresh,' is the most satisfactory of all possible endings. In the person of the kind and witty great lady, Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson, Mr Meredith has given us some of the best of his epigrams, and a close acquaintance with the characters they qualify is necessary to appreciate such triumphs as 'Here she comes with a romantic tale on her eyelashes,' applied to Lætitia Dale, 'Phœbus Apollo turned fasting friar,' to Whitford, and above all, the 'dainty rogue in porcelain,' to Clara. The dialogue of 'The Egoist,' is pitched in a high key, so high that to some untrained ears the result is not more than silence. 'The exceedingly lively conversation at his table was lauded by Lady Culmer, "though," said she, "what it all meant and what was the drift of it, I couldn't tell to save my life. Is it every day the same with you here?" "Very much." "How you must enjoy a spell of dulness."' Mr Meredith gives us no spells of dulness, and those who, like Mr Dale, are 'unable to cope with analogies,' and 'have but strength for the slow digestion

of facts,' are likely to have a hard time of it. But they have Crossjay, and he is such a capital fellow that I must quote his description. He is 'a rosy-cheeked, round bodied rogue of a boy, who fell upon meats and puddings, and defeated them, with a captivating simplicity in his confession that he had never had enough to eat in his life. He had gone through a training for a plentiful table. At first, after a number of helps, young Crossjay would sit and sigh heavily, in contemplation of the unfinished dish. Subsequently, he told his host and hostess that he had two sisters above his own age, and three brothers and two sisters younger than he; "all hungry!" said the boy. His pathos was most comical. It was a good month before he could see pudding taken away from table without a sigh of regret that he could not finish it, as deputy for the Devonport household. The pranks of the little fellow, and his revel in a country life, and muddy wildness in it, amused Lætitia from morning to night. She, when she had caught him, taught him in the morning; Vernon, favoured by the chase, in the afternoon. Young Crossjay would have enlivened any household. He was not only indolent, he was opposed to the acquisition of

knowledge through the medium of books, and would say: "But I don't want to!" in a tone to make a logician thoughtful. Nature was very strong in him. He had, on each return of the hour of instruction, to be plucked out of the earth, rank of the soil, like a root, for the exercise of his big round head-piece on these tyrannous puzzles. But the habits of birds, and the place for their eggs, and the management of rabbits, and the tickling of fish, and poaching joys with combative boys of the district, and how to wheedle a cook for a luncheon for a whole day in the rain, he soon knew of his great nature.'

If it is the ultimate fate of Mr Meredith's admirers to become a fighting minority, it is probable that they will rarely choose 'The Tragic Comedians' for a battle ground. It is not so much a novel as a problem of hard incredible facts, only to be solved by the application of the spirit of comedy, and audacious is the imagination that can conceive Alvan as a comic character. It gives the impression of a case presented by an advocate of extreme insight, eloquence, and conviction.

Mr Swinburne, who, as a critic, is perhaps rather one who lights the way than an infallible

guide, in his splendid eulogy of Charlotte Brontë, has attempted the hard task of distinguishing between what he regards as the two great classes of imaginative writing, and assigning to George Eliot and George Meredith foremost places in the honourable, but inferior class, whose methods are intellectual rather than instinctive, he says that 'George Eliot, a woman of the first order of intellect, has once and again shown how much further, and more steadily, and more hopelessly, and more irretrievably, and more intolerably wrong it is possible for mere intellect to go, than it ever can be possible for mere genius.' Now, while it may be permissible wholly to dissent from Mr Swinburne's judgment upon the memorable incident, which he cites as the justification of this passage, and to doubt the soundness of a principle that seems to require or condone the absence of that greatest gift of God-like reason from the highest imaginative expression, it is certain that great intellectual gifts may be employed in the production of elaborate error. Mr Meredith has himself given an admirable example of this in Sir Austin Feverel, whose antithesis—the invaluable Mrs Berry—triumphantly vindicates the cause of the simple natural instincts. In 'Diana of the Crossways,'

he seems to invite criticism on these lines. I have said that he has a taste for curious cases. Here we have to accept no less than this: that a woman, incapable of base imaginings, who is, as he says, 'mentally active up to the point of spiritual clarity,' may yet act basely. It is an appeal from the judgments of the world. A moral lapse in the direction of treachery is impossible to conceive of Diana. Her act must be the result of abnormal mental conditions. We may most satisfactorily elude the question by calling it an act of temporary madness. It is as if the custodian of a magazine should apply torch to powder with no prospective or immediate thought of an explosion. For Diana was brought up to politics. She had a political environment. Her act involved not merely paralysis of reason, but distortion of instinct, and it seems to me that Mr Meredith has here fallen into the temptation to attempt to defeat his old enemy, the confident, clamorous world, upon its own terms, and has committed the capital fault, foreign to his best method, of fitting his character to the situation he has chosen. Incredible too seems Dacier's merely temporary incredulity and prompt acceptance of the literal fact. Of course, no reader can take him for a

great-hearted man—those who remember his author's care in the selection of names will find his to be ominously composed of sibilants—but he is represented as not only without compassion, but almost without curiosity. His passages with Constance Asper are strong and biting satire, rather than impartial art.

But if there is any justice in these criticisms—I do not need to be reminded of their presumption and insufficiency—they leave untouched the essential parts of a noble character, of a various and generally consistent picture of life, and of a piece of writing throughout forcible and brilliant, which, to adopt the familiar simile that makes language the garment of thought, is of fine and strong texture, stiff with gems.

It might have been supposed that the access of what is probably the nearest to popularity that Mr Meredith will obtain, would provoke some genial recognition in the latest of his novels. He has had a good advertisement—the legitimate advertisement of interested discussion, and the public, or some portion of it, was prepared to give him favourable consideration. The opening chapters of 'One of our Conquerors,' however, must have dissipated any ex-

pectation that he would seize what might be considered his opportunity. The 'Old Veuve' chapter is as hopelessly removed from the 'large accent' of simplicity as from the thick accent of coarseness, and Colney Durance is a worthy successor to his author's other brilliant mouth-pieces. Yet it contains three characters of quite the first rank. Nataly and Nesta are a mother and daughter standing alone in English fiction. The beauty, nobility, and pathos of their relations is beyond all description or praise. Victor, too, is one of the characters that only Mr Meredith could produce. He is of the rank of Sir Willoughby and Richmond Roy, and with Nataly completes a great tragic combination. If Mr Meredith's style were the worst in the world, if every fault that is urged against him were understated, such characterisation would place him at the head of his order.

This paper is rather a record of impressions than a justification by first principles, and it is time to sum up briefly the qualities upon which Mr Meredith's claim for acceptance as a great novelist might be founded. Leaving out of account occasional aberrations from which no one is free, he has a style at once vivid and thoughtful, his dialogue is brilliant and gener-

ally characteristic, he is a master of narrative, a great wit, and a genial and profound humorist; in description he is a poet, in incident an inspired witness; he has insight, charity, and patriotism; he has tragic and pathetic power; and he is capable of combining these great qualities into a consistent and effectual whole. With him the novel is a moral agent, not because he is immediately and professedly didactic, but because his head and heart are right, and he deals fully and sincerely with the aspects of life that he has chosen to describe. It may be said that though 'where virtue is these are more virtuous,' there is one first and sufficient test beside which all others are irrelevant—that a novelist must stand or fall by his characters—by the number and quality of realised and realisable human beings that he has devised and presented. Of all others, this is the test that the lover of Meredith will welcome. And especially will such an one claim for him, not a high place merely, but the supreme place as a delineator of good women—of good women, because, of their kind, Becky Sharp, and Beatrix Esmond, Rosamond Vincy, and Hetty Sorrel can hardly be excelled. He is a lover of England, and if there be any that think patriot-

ism a narrow or exclusive passion, he may pass from Janet, and Lucy, and Dahlia, and Rose, and Clara, the very flower of English womanhood, to the Irish Diana, the French Renée, the German Ottilia, the Italian Emilia. To say that his heroes are not unworthy of these, is the highest praise that can be given to them. They have this much in common with the conventional heroes of romance, that they are handsome, dashing, virtuous. The addition of brains and purpose has actually made them interesting, a feat in which no other first rate English novelist has succeeded. To enlist our sympathies, Thackeray must deprive his men of personal graces, as Esmond, or of brains, as Harry Warrington; Scott and Dickens produced walking gentlemen, and George Eliot never attempted the type.

There is a class of critics which constantly bewails our modern craving for the new and strange. 'Who now reads Fielding, and Dickens, and Thackeray?' ask Mr Lang and his fellows. Who does not? To read good new novels gives us an enlarged capacity for the old. It enlarges our charity too, and helps us to a more lenient view of the shallow cynicism in Thackeray, shallow because he was at heart no cynic, of

those characters of Fielding's that have so much more of convention than of nature in their composition, of the school-girl crudities of Charlotte Brontë, the dulness of Scott, the sham passion of Dickens, the occasional flat passion of George Eliot. Who, indeed, is perfect, except Jane Austen? Her reach, and grasp are coincident, and if the world could be reduced to her scale, she would be supreme and all-sufficient. And yet, in spite of their faults, I suppose that most of us would place above her all the great writers I have named. I confess that to me Mr Meredith's faults are at least not greater than theirs. His virtues entitle him to an honourable place among them, and if it is denied by his own generation, our children, and our children's children may repair the error, but they can never atone for the injustice.

MR MEREDITH'S POEMS

'THAT precisely in the particulars which would win them popular attention, the men whom it would be most profitable for the public to study should so often fail, becomes to me, as I grow older, one of those deepest mysteries of life, which I can only hope to have explained to me, when my task of interpretation is ended.'

These pathetic words of one great preacher of our time seem to have a particular significance of application to another. Different as are their methods and their aims Mr Ruskin and Mr Meredith are alike in this—that through all the variations of their work they maintain a whole view of life; and as in Mr Ruskin's conception architecture is the head and total which embraces and subordinates sculpture, painting, and all manner of design, so do they regard the whole conduct of life as necessarily greater than a part,

even though this be the exercise of an art or a devotion to art.

Mr Meredith's work rests upon the sure foundation of a keen and delicate appreciation of life. This is the rough material of poetry, but it must be reformed in the crucible of the imagination and its ends must be shaped by exquisite expression. It would be difficult to write sympathetically of his verse without frequent excursions into his philosophy. Though the artist *pur sang* looks upon morals as the particular weakness of this country and protests against the inveterate British habit of associating them with art, it is likely that for some time to come our poets will be read as much for the message as for the manner. The division of labour is not yet fully accomplished and until a glorified trade unionism of poets arises, art will continue to be vitiated, or vitalised, by the external motive. To take it conversely, must a sermon eschew art? An invitation to the dance may be a work of art, why not an invitation to a sober life? Or is preaching the generic art which embraces every kind? It might be held that it is the great preachers who have been impelled to the succinct forms of art. According to Mr Myers, Tennyson is great by

virtue of 'the intuition, discovery and promulgation of fundamental cosmic law.' The main impulse in the production of much of his poetry is incontestably didactic. He is a zealous moralist, as are Browning, Shelley and Wordsworth; Mr Swinburne's illuminating word of Byron is, 'the excellence of sincerity and strength,' Mr Swinburne himself is at least full of spiritual sustenance; Arnold gives to conduct the first place; Keats and Coleridge are in a minority among the great stars of modern poetry.

The preachers and the teachers cannot be spared. If a division of labour allows him to fashion his part excellently while he knows nothing of the whole undertaking, it degrades the artist to the level of commercial economics. The isolation of art, its separation from life or from the large part of life that consists of conduct, is its besetting danger. The artist who is above or apart from the external politics of life must be controlled by movements in which he has no share. He may do his work with satisfaction to himself and, within its limits, it may be perfect, but its relation to the sum of human activities is a moral relation. Mr Meredith is intensely English though he is never offensively British, and whether he is a poet, a philo-

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sopher, or merely a perverse clever man, he is a vigorous and inveterate preacher. 'Iterate, iterate, harp on the trite,' he says boldly, seeming to lack the artist's horror of recurrence.

Perhaps sermons have fallen into disrepute because there have been so many bad ones. A more constant reason lies in the nature of our egoism. Early in our development we begin to regard ourselves as flowers that need no forcing. We resent a stimulus that mars the full expression of our tendencies, and we are in such mighty fear of our little individualities that we would not expose them to the influence of appeals from without. For sermons are addressed to what we have in common with the rest; they are a calling up into line, and our tortuous peculiarities are dear to us. They may be poor, but they are our own. We prefer to sing the solo out of tune rather than to merge ourselves in the chorus. The austerity of the strait and narrow way competes ill with the gracious curves of the line of least resistance. So by putting a fine point on our selfishness we think to redeem it from baseness.

The egoist is often melancholy, for he who takes himself for his chief study has a sorrowful experience. When pessimism is not yet out of

fashion, when poets still persistently sound their 'eternal note of sadness,' when the so-called realists are elaborating their impeachment of the human race, and when we hear of such dreadful conceptions of the relation of man to nature as of one playing at chess against an automaton of perfect construction which must win, it is a joyful relief to hear a strong and confident voice proclaim that we are not, after all, the actors in a barren tragedy. There are too many sad and terrible books in the world and though we could not now consent to lose some of them, it is time to place the standard higher for masterpieces of misery. It is right that our friends should share our sorrows, but not that we should seek to bring them to our condition of normal gloom. Like Mr Woodhouse in 'Emma' with his 'let us all have a little gruel,' we find it tedious to be miserable alone. Mr Meredith on the other hand, calls on us to share his delight in the beautiful earth, the lasting material for art even when all the conditions of tragedy are reformed away. His poems are the best antidote to the introspective pessimism which is the deplorable tendency of civilised people. A considerable section of them is actually an exhortation against egoism—not indeed against individuality X

—a man must be himself but not too fatuously himself—a declaration of the unity of man and earth. As in the novels Mr Meredith deals with men as individuals, here he is concerned with the life and destiny of man. A loving study of the richness, order, and beauty of the earth, which knows no persistent fits of dulness, is the panacea for all human ills. He views it from no misty transcendental height but closely and reverently, finding in the life of the woods and fields many close and subtle analogies to our life. Earth is more than a background, more than an environment, not merely the scene of man's life and labours, not merely his temporary home. He is of it and for it, its child and its labourer. There are occasions of ecstatic exaltation when the fighters for a cause count life and death as mere external incidents. To secure and perpetuate these emotions—in right degree and quality—is the aim of Mr Meredith's teaching. Our cause is the cause of man, of earth, and through them, if we will, the cause of God, and the sense should be ever with us of the smallness of our personal stake, the greatness of that sum of life of which we are a part.—

'With Life and Death I walked when Love appeared,
And made them on each side a shadow seem.'

and love is here that universal unselfish love.

There is nothing comfortable about this. It is incredibly unattractive to a bourgeois world. Yet, austere and reasonable, it gives a footing where was the quaking bog. The mystery is still a mystery, but it is less a burden if we realise that the seasons' changes, sunshine, wind and rain, the habits of birds and beasts, growth and decay, are not merely the facts by which we must shape our course but are part of our own existence, that the stars are no alien lights, for :—

'The fire is in them whereof we are born,
The music of their motion may be ours.'

Mr Meredith does not hesitate to face the worst. He takes life at its irreducible minimum and finds it good; he confronts it at its hardest and most inexplicable without dismay. In 'A Faith on Trial' which Mr Le Gallienne has called 'the most spiritually helpful of modern poems,' the situation is no less than that

'When the hand that never had failed
In its pressure to mine, hung slack.'

His test case is untainted by egoism of the baser kind. The loss of comrade and mate is not to be sustained by the weakening of human ties,

but by the strengthening of the ties that bind
Man to Earth.

‘For the flesh in revolt at her laws,
Neither song nor smile in ruth,
Nor promise of things to reveal,
Has she, nor a word she saith :
We are asking her wheels to pause.
Well knows she the cry of unfaith.
If we strain to the farther shore,
We are catching at comfort near.
Assurances, symbols, saws,
Revelations in legends, light
To eyes rolling darkness, these
Desired of the flesh in affright,
For the which it will swear to adore,
She yields not for prayers at her knees ;
The woolly beast bleating will shear.
These are our sensual dreams ;
Of the yearning to touch, to feel
The dark Impalpable sure,
And have the Unveiled appear ;
Whereon ever black she beams,
Doth of her terrible deal,
She who dotes over ripeness at play,
Rosiness fondles and feeds,
Guides it with shepherding crook,
To her sports and her pastures away.
Not she gives the tear for the tear :
Harsh wisdom gives Earth, no more ;
In one the spur and the curb :
An answer to thoughts or deeds ;
To the Legends an alien look ;
To the Questions a figure of clay.
Yet we have but to see and hear,
Crave we her medical herb.’

Again and again the uselessness of the vague appeal from the inevitable is insisted upon :—

'He may entreat, aspire,
He may despair, and she has never heed.
She drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,
Not his desire.'

The natural appetites, personal communion and fellowship, what is present and immediate, are all good, are all precious, but sight and touch are only the ministers to memory and imagination—memory, not the revival of vain regrets, but the perennial store of happy impressions and noble emotions—imagination—not an instrument of self-deception, but the faculty that winnows and purifies, combines and projects.

What comfort then, may man look for when death comes at last to him, when all the supports that love and service of Earth have given begin to tremble beneath him? He looks for no comfort of a sensual kind. He acquiesces in the course of Nature, and does not seek to impose his own cravings upon it: his spirit

'neither desires
The sleep nor the glory; it trusts.'

In imagination, so far as failing powers can serve, he may send out his thoughts towards the life that unrolls itself beyond him, he may yet feel

those unselfish and impersonal emotions of kindness and love to men and pride in the race that we feel at our best, and he sinks into the void fortified by a faith other than that which builds itself on the egoist's soul.

'Into the breast that gave the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?'

Perhaps there is nothing very new about all this as it is here barely and dimly indicated, but the messages which the human spirit now requires are not vague illuminations or rough awakening truths, but exquisite adaptations to its needs. Our teachers must be of the rank of poets. We grasp at the splendours of Mr Meredith's poetry and find ourselves sustained by its reason. We are ruled by impressions, feelings, emotions. He guides them to flow in the channels of reason. Who shall say which of us sees the furthest into the sky? He brings us to the green earth, there to find the measure of our souls. Our egoism becomes the life of widening circles—self, family, country, race—until at last :—

'this love of earth reveals
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift.'

No better instance than this last superb line

could be given of the mutual aid of form and spirit. It owes its effect to art, its power to wisdom and truth.

If Mr Meredith's great gifts of refreshment and sustainment are sorely needed, they are of too little avail. He calls for a very keen intelligence or an immense patience. He has himself referred to that 'acute and honourable minority' who read his books, and some of us may claim to belong to a minority even more honourable as it is less acute. 'Envy me, sir, envy me,' said the fearful Mr Malthus in the 'Suicide Club,' 'I am a coward!' And, envy me, many an one of us might say, for I am a dull reader. For us the gold was seldom on the surface; we have dug for it with labour and pain until it became our rich possession. The glimpses and fragments of meaning are sometimes more to us than any plain tale could be. And if we are lost in the 'Woods of Westminster' what does it matter when we come across such verse as:—

' Mossy-footed squirrels leap,
Soft as winnowing plumes of sleep.'

Yet when we have made the most of such consolations it may be confessed that at times the difficulties beset us. We are disposed to share

the spitefulness of the uninitiated 'to whom the incomprehensible is the abominable,' for this obscurity is of all faults the least easy to forgive. We may more readily pardon dulness or feebleness in a writer, for these give us an advantage over him that is not altogether unpleasant. When he baffles our wits it irritates us into blaming him out of all proportion to the offence. Faults of weakness that are covered by easy cadences are not easily distinguished. Faults of misdirected power, of wilfulness, the faults of a strong man, bristle out only too conspicuously. To overlook or to condone the one variety and to condemn the other is the time-hallowed prerogative of incompetency (and most of us are incompetent in our various degrees). Vigorous and original work is sure to arouse the opposition of all conventional critics.

Most readers experience some uneasiness at the increasing difficulty of English poetry, and fear at times that they will be left behind. Hitherto we have made a great family party with Shakespeare and Milton, Goldsmith and Scott and the rest. We could all enjoy good literature together. There was at least the appearance of community. Soon, however, that active minority, the clever people, will have books

specially written for them, a step in the evolutionary process that will subdivide the human race. We have already a foretaste of the time when the study of literature will most advantageously be pursued concurrently with the more teasing developments of the higher mathematics. With all allowances for subject and method, I think it cannot be denied that in Mr Meredith's verse many difficulties arise, not so much from intricacy or subtlety of thought as from remoteness and even irrelevancy of reference. Of course the essence of his method is to discard the irrelevant, but he does this to the extent of omitting the necessary connections between ideas that are not obviously related. Great as is his command of verse he sometimes lays upon it impossible tasks. Putting aside the question of so-called 'inspiration' which can account at most for but a small part of any poet's work, verse is a compromise between thought and the conditions of its expression, and in cases of their apparent happy union we don't know how much is stifled or withdrawn. Mr Meredith is perhaps too persistent in forcing into harness an unmanageable idea. Even at the expense of symmetry or coherence he uses the word or phrase which seems to him to reveal his mean-

ing most vividly or searchingly. A writer may be controlled and limited by his sense of form, but form is at the best an obedient servant. Mr Meredith has never been overawed by his own style. It is not an instrument of too much dignity for every-day use, and if it is not sufficiently flexible for his purpose, he breaks it. Perfection of style cannot make amends for leaving half the world untouched or half his own mind unsounded. He does not know the limitations of perfection. With perfection interest ceases, for the perception of perfection is the complete comprehension that brings us to a standstill. We crave these final achievements that arrest and calm the mind, and the craving is a form of indolence. Mr Meredith's work is too earnest, too far-reaching, too great for perfection. Who can follow all ramifications, weigh all essences, distinguish all relations of a great artist? It is opposed to the spirit of art to be satisfied with a low order of success. As it is comparatively easy for a painter to obtain tone if his key of colour is low, it is comparatively, not actually, easy to express placid thoughts in harmonious words. The technical difficulties of verse increase with the vividness, variety, and strength of what has to be expressed, and much of what

is greatest and most significant in art is marred by irregularities and lapses. No competent person will deny that Mr Meredith is a profound critic of life. No less will it be denied that his verse is remarkable, distinguished, powerful. He has not feared to be strong lest he should cease to be exquisite, and the plausible attack upon him will be the contention that his work is not beautiful, but only full of beauties; that verse is an instrument that he has forced and strained to his service, but that he lacks the fine sense of harmony to interpret the sweetness of nature.

To some of his work this objection may be not wholly irrelevant though the concession may mean rather a change of classification than a condemnation, and if to the critic of complete culture, smooth verse only is tolerable it might be worth while for the Philistine to resist the approach of enlightenment until he has assimilated the substance and bathed his spirit in the glories of this verse.

In verse, as in prose, Mr Meredith is something of an experimentalist. His creations are too strong to respect invariably the limits of a practised criticism. His ideas do not always come to him clothed in their appropriate ex-

pression. If not beyond the reaches of our souls they are at least beyond the reaches of our language. He has neither the wonderful spontaneity of Shelley or Mr Swinburne nor the acquired harmonious taste of Rossetti or Tennyson. These, or some of these, it is possible to read with a degree of sensuous enjoyment in that condition of partial attention when the mind travels little beyond the sound and form of the verse. With Mr Meredith understanding is a necessity of acquiescence. Such a line as :—

‘ The years, which fasten rigid whom they cool,’

requires, for most of us, a slight mental effort before we can accept it. He is so alert and vivacious, his ideas are drawn from so wide a field and have such a peculiar impress of his own that we cannot cheat ourselves with a conventional acceptance. There can be no doubt, I think, that in his case sympathy and attention do much toward promoting harmony of rhythm. He is not of the race with whom ‘ a common greyness silvers everything.’ His world is very much alive. Beauties of movement appeal to him more than beauties of repose.

If his verse is sometimes disfigured by traces

of hard thinking, it is certain, too, that his triumphs of expression are innumerable. Few poets could render such an account as he if value were estimated by the proportion of fine lines to quantity of verse, and perhaps even fewer if by the wealth and variety of thought in single lines and stanzas. His concentration is extreme. No one has less of the inclination to languish over vowel sounds. Of course to those whose demand is only for the 'sincere large accent, nobly plain,' who accept without qualification the 'simple, sensuous, impassioned' definition of poetry and whose rigid standard is founded on nothing less secure than Homer, Wordsworth and Scott, Mr Meredith is often an irritation. They relieve themselves by platitudes about a poetic gift marred by eccentricities and obscurities. He can be plain enough on occasion, and his plainness is welcomed sometimes with the excess of appreciation awarded to the effect that depends on contrast. And it might be supposed that no lover of poetry could be insensible to the splendours of his style. These attributes of style can hardly be denied to him—that his message gains in the telling: that told in any other way something would be lost: that what is said in his own distinctive

manner yet appeals to a sense derived from the best of his predecessors. Distinction of style is his from first to last; we find it through all varieties of his verse; in the plain line from 'The Appeasement of Demeter,'

'The hand of man was a defeated hand,'

'Long watches through at one with godly night,'

'A lily in a linen clout
She looked when they had lain her out'

'Too late may valour then avail!
As you beheld my cannonier,

When with the staff of Benedek
On the plateau of Königgrätz,
You saw below that wedging speck;
Foresaw proud Austria rammed to wreck,
Where Chlum drove deep in smoky jets.'

He may be obscure as in

'A woman who is wife, despotic lords
Count faggot at the question, shall she live!'

which acquaintance with the context can hardly render luminous, or queer as in

'Love it so you could accost
Fellowly a livid ghost,'

which is more remarkable for uncouthness than force, or harsh as in

'In that grey veil, green grassblades brushed we by,'

a line which no effort can bring trippingly off the tongue, but in all these there is a certain ineffaceable dignity of style. He is never feeble, never desultory, never obvious. We never suspect him of not being a great man. No doubts or qualifications beset us when we read the opening lines of 'Phœbus with Admetus'

'When by Zeus relenting the mandate was revoked
Sentencing to exile the bright sun-god,'

with its fine effect of accent hammered on the last three syllables. This whole poem is flooded by the sun. Such a line as—

'Bulls that walk the pastures with kingly-flashing coats,'

will last one all day and come fresh again in the morning. With 'Phœbus with Admetus' must be placed the beautiful 'Melampus' whose tender fancy and noble charm are reared upon a firm substructure of science and philosophy.

It is hardly possible to conceive that any one of Mr Meredith's poems could have been written by another man, but perhaps of his greater ones the beauties of 'Love in a Valley' are nearest to beauties not distinctively his own. Yet its most exquisite stanza could be attributed to no other:—

‘ Happy, happy time, when the white star hovers
 Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew,
 Near the face of dawn, that draws athwart the darkness,
 Threading it with colour, as yewberries the yew.
 Thicker crowd the shades while the grave East deepens
 Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.
 Maiden still the morn is ; and strange she is, and secret ;
 Strange her eyes ; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-shells.’

Such verse cannot suffer by comparison with the work of any English poet. Nor is success of such high quality unique or rarely occasional. ‘ The Day of the Daughter of Hades ’ a poem seldom quoted, and except to earnest students, practically unknown, is certainly one of Mr Meredith’s best and most characteristic works. It is the story of the daughter of Proserpine; how she escaped for a single day from her gloomy birthplace, and of the uses to which she put her short, precarious holiday. The inherited love of Earth is strong upon her :—

‘ As one that had toil of her own
 She followed the lines of wheat
 Tripping straight through the field, green blades,
 To the groves of olive grey,
 Downy-grey, golden tinged : and to glades
 Where the pear-blossom thickens the spray
 In a night, like the snow-packed storm :
 Pear, apple, almond, plum :
 Not wintry now : pushing, warm !
 And she touched them with finger and thumb,

As the vine-hook closes : she smiled,
 Recounting again and again,
 Corn, wine, fruit, oil ! like a child,
 With the meaning known to men.'

Again, the peculiar delicacy, reticence and dignity of the verse is shown in the description of the meeting with the youth Callistes :—

'She did not fly,
 Nor started at his advance :
 She looked, as when infinite thirst
 Pants pausing to bless the springs,
 Refreshed, unsated. Then first
 He trembled with awe of the things
 He had seen ; and he did transfer,
 Divining and doubting in turn,
 His reverence unto her ;
 Nor asked what he crouched to learn :
 The whence of her, whither, and why
 Her presence there, and her name,
 Her parentage : under which sky
 Her birth, and how hither she came,
 So young, a virgin, alone,
 Unfriended, having no fear,
 As Oreads have ; no moan,
 Like the lost upon earth ; no tear ;
 Not a sign of the torch in the blood,
 Though her stature had reached the height
 When mantles a tender rud
 In maids that of youths have sight,
 If maids of our seed they be :
 For he said : A glad vision art thou !
 And she answered him : Thou to me
 As men utter a vow.'

The poem leaves the impression of a noble pathos, far removed from the cherishing of sentiment, which gives to the Daughter of Hades spiritual affinities to the more realised and elaborated heroines of Mr Meredith's novels.

I believe it is the fashion to extol the 'Modern Love' volume at the expense of the later ones. If something less vivid and concentrated it is less inveterately didactic and less obscure than they. The title poem is, of course, unique and incomparable; it has no equal, for there is nothing like it. It has been praised well by great poets. Exquisite details combine to a fine unity of effect. It holds a position between the novels and the nature poems, between the individual and the typical. The avoidance of a regular sonnet form may seem to some an instance of its author's determination to do nothing in the usual way. It is evident, however, that the octave and sestet employed in a continuous dramatic poem would be formal and monotonous, while a closing rhymed couplet would be even less appropriate to its character. Although it is intensely tragical it has no taint of pessimism. If it shows that vague aspirations are not a sufficient equipment for the changes and chances

of married life it gives no discouragement to lovers who have the sympathy and the comradeship that come of interests and work in common. It is an effective beacon over the shallows of sentiment and might save many a desperate wreck. The love 'that fed not on the advancing hours' is burnt out, romance is evaporated. There remain many meanderings of pity and generosity, reconciliations and interludes, all tending to a tragic end. Yet we know that there is a specific; that to the marriage of true minds there is no impediment. Consistency may seem a ludicrous attribute to claim for a poet. Yet Mr Meredith does see life whole, and so is not at the mercy of the whimsical lyric moods, the little casual joys and sorrows that delight us in another. The main stream of his poetry does not reject contributory rills, but it does not overflow its banks in chance irrigation. 'Modern Love' is in accord with all the later work in its foundation of reason and reality. The sentimentalist whose cry is always for permanence would inflate every boy and girl affair to the heroic dimensions, and would pin down a butterfly to secure eternal beauty. On the other hand the scientific cynicists who insist, and so far rightly insist, on change as the

necessity of growth, refuse to see that change without limitation is chaos, and that the life of man and woman within the prosaic confines of marriage may be progressive and exalted. Nature 'plays for Seasons not Eternities,' says Mr Meredith, and again advises us to 'kiss the seasons and shun regrets.' Here is the spirit of Omar Khayyam, but the later poet has a further word to say of nature, a word which marks the difference between his hope and the despair of the Persian, that 'of her harmonies she is full sure.' Yet sometimes when we read certain stanzas of 'Modern Love'—the first, the last, the 'Am I failing,' the 'We saw the swallows gathering in the sky,' the 'In our old shipwrecked days there was an hour,' philosophy seems to shrink into a small matter. It is not strange to us that poetic impulses have not always regarded the marks and limits set by the rule of life; and then again our imaginations are awakened by that constant conception of life, that 'ever fixed mark' that shines always through the moods of art. For he never fails us. We always see him like the Sirius of his great sonnet :

'With cheerful fervour of a warrior's mien
Who holds in his great heart the battle scales.'

To estimate a poet rightly judgment must be enforced by enthusiasm. There are many careful and excellent persons who hold that Mr Meredith is an extremely clever man who has wrecked himself by affectation and eccentricities. They are often highly sensitive; by no means dull or stereotyped of judgment; and they remain unconvinced of his surpassing merit. Confronted by a confident enthusiasm they declare that such a state precludes a sober judgment. The lukewarm does duty for temperance, carping is mistaken for discrimination. Yet some things can be seen clearly only in the light of passion : emotion is the legitimate stimulant of reason. Faults we may admit :—

' Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete,
Yet, good gossips, beauty that makes holy
Earth and air, may brave faults from head to feet.'

And the good gossips may be assured that nothing is further from our minds than a deprecatory or defensive attitude. No ingenious explanation of failure is necessary for a great, a brilliant, an overwhelming success. The depreciators of Mr Meredith's verse might arouse considerable anger among his admirers were it not that pity prevails towards those who cannot accept with a whole

heart the most stimulating and enthralling of writers.

In all differences of opinion about these matters there remains the appeal to posterity. This is a harmless exercise and would be less popular, perhaps, if we ran the risk of being confounded before that shadowy tribunal. It is curious that a conviction of the decadence of taste and viciousness of tendency of our own time may co-exist with the expectation of a generation of clear sight and cool brain. However this may be, I think it is no paradox that the best time to appreciate a poet is the time in which he lives and writes. Posterity may get the right perspective, the right proportions, but they are of less account than the vivid glimpses through the dust and turmoil of the present. In all the greatest work there is a constant element that defies time, that is true to the unchanging facts of nature and life, and this is always fresh and vital. But the form and temper of the work are often suited, by an art only less than the highest to time and circumstances. This temporary value, this special didactic value, is slighted by an age in which every man takes his own casual errors as a standard. Yet for everyone and for all time there remains in these poems that

intensely individual expression that brings to us the smell of earth, the forms and hues of its growths, the cries and movements of its creatures, the glow and quiver of its lights, every detail as part of a great harmony, and every detail with its own peculiar significance. If more beautiful verse has been written about the earth there has been none that makes her seem so beautiful. If we take Mr Meredith simply as an impressionist we find such verse as this:—

' Now seems none but the spider lord ;
 Star in circle his web waits prey,
 Silvering bush-mounds, blue-brushing sward ;
 Slow runs the hour, swift flits the ray.
 Now to his thread-shroud is he nigh,
 Nigh to the tangle where wings are sealed,
 He who frolicked the jewelled fly ;
 All is adroop on the down and the weald.'

' Mists more lone for the sheep-bell enwrap
 Nights that tardily let slip a morn
 Paler than moons, and on noontide's lap
 Flame dies cold, like the rose late born.'

And again of very different weather :—

' Is the land ship ? we are rolled, we drive
 Tritonly, cleaving hiss and hum ;
 Whirl with the dead, or mount or dive,
 Or down in dregs, or on in scum.
 And drums the distant, pipes the near,
 And vale and hill are grey in grey,
 As when the surge is crumbling sheer,
 And sea-mews wing the haze of spray.

Clouds—are they bony witches?—swarms,
 Darting swift on the robber's flight,
 Hurry an infant sky in arms :
 It peeps, it becks ; 'tis day, 'tis night.
 Black while over the loop of blue
 The swathe is closed, like shroud on corse.
 Lo, as if swift the Furies flew,
 The Fates at heel at a cry to horse !'

with its rapid change of metaphor to coincide with the rush and swirl of the elements. Such verse is not less exquisite because it seems to make our casements rattle. Mr Meredith is the poet of the wind and the rain. He has the most reality in dealing with these subjects because he is the most imaginative. There is a soaking wet day in 'The Egoist' that lives in the memory of the reader, and in 'Earth and a Wedded Woman' there is a night of sweet rain that remains a perpetual refreshment.

Few things in Mr Meredith's work are more striking than his success in fields that might be thought not quite his own. 'Vittoria' is such a triumph, and as it is the legitimate successor to 'The Last of the Mohicans,' thrilling the man as this the boy, so 'The Nuptials of Attila' ministers to a need that the 'Lays of Ancient Rome' might have created. We have sung our 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' between the one and the other. Then we all know Mr Swinburne's

praise of 'Margaret's Bridal Eve' awarding it the next place, 'perhaps not very far below it' to Rossetti's 'Sister Helen' high praise indeed, for there is room for a gradation of masterpieces below that matchless ballad. Readers of Mr Meredith's novels know that he has an extraordinary range. His poems extend that range indefinitely: a dozen might be named of which no two have any categorical affinity, and leave us yet works so far apart from each other and the rest as the noble 'Ode to France,' the strangely impressive 'Song of Theodolinda' and 'The Young Princess,' a beautiful romantic ballad with nightingales and the tinkle of steel in it in which we nearly, but perhaps not quite, forget that its author is a preacher.

Of course variety is not the certain sign of greatness, but variety of excellence is better than accumulation of excellence.

Mr Meredith has not written a play, or at least he has never produced one, but some readers of 'Chloe' have thought that in this short tale there is fine dramatic material, and certainly anything that he attempted in this direction would be of interest and value. The ardent disciple will go further, and on very little provocation will maintain, not only that his criticism

of life is the largest, sanest, most stimulating of the time, but that he is the best political intelligence as well as one of the best literary critics. It may be a damaging admission to make of a poem, but there is a great deal of sound sense, and good democratic politics in 'The Empty Purse,' and the 'Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt' is at least better reading than Mrs Lynn Lynton's polite trifling.

As to Mr Meredith's relation to the general reader, it is not likely that he can make much progress. Outside the small minority which loves poetry there is no doubt a larger audience which will read it under certain conditions—if it is fashionable, if it is diverting, if it is distinctly understood to be unexceptionable and improving in its tendency, if it is easy. 'The Woods of Westermain' appearing in the forefront of 'Poems and Lyrics,' makes short work of feeble inquirers and probably saves a good deal of trouble. But it is no more reasonable to judge Mr Meredith by misunderstanding his poems of exceptional difficulty than to consider Browning merely as the poet of 'Fifine at the Fair' and 'Sordello,' or Blake of 'William Bond' and the Prophetic Books. His poems are seldom easy, but yet more rarely are they quite dark to

the average mind. Like most good poetry they need patience and attention, though it would, of course, be idle to deny that they are more difficult than most good poetry. We must take them as they are, for it is too late for Mr Meredith, whether he is mannerist or stylist, to begin afresh. As an earnest man grows older his intentions become more persistent. The tendency of a difficult writer is to become more difficult. As he has never tempered his expression to the capacity of his readers he becomes, with practice, more accomplished in a concentration of allusion that satisfies himself. Thus as he works primarily with reference to his own mind and not with constant consideration for the expectations and capacities of his readers we get closer to the individuality of such a writer. Perhaps in the particular case there is an opening for a populariser or interpreter, for a selection made in the interests of plain people would miss much of the best, and there seems to be little prospect now that Mr Meredith will reconsider the too flattering estimate of the mental grasp of his readers. His latest volume contains the pathetically beautiful 'Jump to Glory Jane' and several fine patriotic pieces, as well as the 'Night of Frost in May' one of the poems about

which there can be little difference of opinion, but it contains also 'The Empty Purse' and an ode or two that come up to his standard of impracticability for all but the earnest seeker. His appeal, then, is, almost wholly, to that inner class of critical and serious readers who must always in the long run determine the position of a poet. By some of them it will be urged that eccentricities and lapses disqualify him from taking the rank that should be his by virtue of his matter and style at their best. 'The best poetry,' says Matthew Arnold, 'will be found to have a power of informing, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can.' Judged by this standard Meredith stands high among the highest. With clear vision he has realised what lies within our sight, finding here infinite interest and infinite delight :—

'So mine are there new fruitings rich
The simple to the common brings.
I keep the youth of souls who pitch
Their joy in this old heart of things.'

And so the great philosopher, the deep and intricate thinker brings us back to a simple love of Earth :

'For love we Earth, then serve we all ;
Her mystic secret then is ours :

We fall, or view our treasures fall,
Unclouded, as beholds her flowers

Earth, from a night of frosted wreck,
Enrobed in morning's mounted fire,
When lowly, with a broken neck
The crocus lays her cheek to mire.'

A hard lesson: and when we have learnt it—
when our love of the greater life supports us
through the dark valley—we have made the
advance from stoicism to fortitude.

^

GEORGE BORROW

GEORGE BORROW has an established position in the world of letters, and his qualities are, perhaps, hardly matters for debate. When, however, a man of genius is placed fairly and securely on his pedestal he runs some risk of neglect, for as he is no longer attacked, he need not be defended, and literary criticism, except in rare instances, is nothing if not militant. Comparative methods are usually competitive also, but it is difficult to find any one with whom Borrow may be compared profitably. I think that he should be written about occasionally, if only for the reason that, his name being so seldom heard, there is some danger of the right people going to their graves without encountering him—a mischance that cannot be contemplated easily by any right-thinking man. Of course, he is known in 'literary' circles, but then all the right people

are not of these, and there might be reasonable cause for complaint that so few disinterested attempts have been made to direct attention to so notable a writer, a writer with whom literary form is subordinated to a strong personality expressing itself with vigorous eccentricity.

Mr Theodore Watts has lately put forth an ingenious claim, for himself and another distinguished man of letters, to exclusive rights in Borrow. It is a personal matter, he says, and they knew him personally. They have an advantage, and it is possible that our points of view are wrong and that we can never see the meaning and value of Mr Watts' observations. Yet if our Borrow is not the true one or the best one, he is at least a good one—quite good enough for us. If we do not rank him as a genius, it is because it is impossible to rank him at all. There are men of genius, and there is George Borrow.

In this very serious world we leave ourselves little time for the pursuit of innocent pleasure. It is, no doubt, a pleasure to read a poem by Tennyson, a novel by Mr James, or a psychological study by one of the great Russians, but these are pleasures to which we bend our minds as to a responsible undertaking. For

what they give us they demand something in return. Didactic art is not in vogue, but a moral lesson is nevertheless enforced by every work that calls for judgment. Art may be unmoral, but criticism, when it passes beyond casual appreciation, is a moral exercise of the sternest and most fatiguing kind. The critical reader loses a good deal of the pleasure that comes of ease of mind and abandonment to the direction of his author, though it may be hoped that he makes himself amends in other ways. There are among the delights of Borrow that he may best be approached uncritically, that he does not require careful attention, and that judgment upon him is unnecessary. We like this sort of thing, or we don't like it, and we need no canons of art to determine it. I do not propose, then, to weigh, to analyse, to test; such processes might leave us nothing very substantial, for Borrow's peculiar essence or aroma would inevitably elude my coarse attempts; I shall be satisfied to convey, principally from his own lips, an impression of a curious and fascinating personage, and to introduce or to recall, as far as space will permit, a few of the queer figures in his queer world.

In the perpetual struggle waged between variety and uniformity the railway and all it brings with it have given to the latter at least a temporary advantage. They have levelled many of the little inequalities which make up a great part of such a book as 'Lavengro.' With the stage-coachmen—monsters of insolence and rapacity, according to Borrow—has disappeared much of the miscellaneous life of the roads. Horse-fairs are not what they were, the Gypsies are gradually being merged in other races or exterminated, remote eccentrics of all kinds have been brought under the civilising influence of the morning paper. Whether the morning paper is helping to destroy all useful and beautiful variations, or whether it is fulfilling its function in lifting the generality of the race to a higher level whence the variations may begin anew, is a question that we need not discuss here, for it is a serious question. Anyhow, the conditions that might help to make another 'Lavengro' have almost ceased to exist. Where now may we meet with a ratcatcher who is filled with enthusiasm for his calling, believing it to be the finest and most interesting in the world? The ratcatcher now strains toward a sense of proportion, and adopting the foolish and

misleading view that he is only a ratcatcher, endeavours to put himself into right relations to rats and to the universe, and the chances are, either that he has progressive ideas and hopes to see his son an alderman, or that he sinks into an abasement that is irrational and immoral. It is this fatal anxiety to get the proportions right that threatens the interest of life. In *Borrow*, happily, they are all wrong. He is crammed with prejudices and irrelevancies of every kind; he is full of useless knowledge; he is unaccountable and inconsistent. He leaves us in doubt as to whether he is the most self-revealing or the most secretive of men; and, excellent humorist as he is, he staggers us with the intermissions of his humour.

I should, I suppose, after recording that *Borrow* was born in 1803, at East Dereham, in Norfolk, proceed to deduce certain characteristics from his parentage, and as he came on his father's side from a Cornish, and on his mother's from a Norman stock, I feel that in neglecting to enlarge upon these points, I am missing an opportunity. To attempt to account for him scientifically would be, I am convinced, a difficult task, and it must suffice to say that as his father was a recruiting officer

and shifted his quarters according to the exigencies of his profession the boy's bent towards change and wandering had much encouragement, especially as in the matter of companions and recreations he seems to have had a fairly free hand. He was thrown upon the world very early, and in London, where he sought his fortune, he soon drifted into a publisher's hack. He had a share in the compilation of the 'Newgate Calendar,' work which necessitated a peculiar and not entirely uncongenial course of reading. According to his own, or rather to Lavengro's account, it was the proceeds of the 'Life of Joseph Sell'—a very remarkable *tour de force*—that enabled him to quit London and commence a roving life. It is said that this work has been searched for occasionally by keen Borrovians, but as it is more than probable that the book, like its subject, is wholly imaginary, it is not strange that no one has yet found it. The actual details of Borrow's wanderings through England and elsewhere belong to the unrevealed, and will most likely never be disentangled from the mass of autobiographical romance. One of the most curious authentic records is that he was a foreign correspondent for the *Morning Herald* in 1837-9, and is said

to have been the first of the kind. He married in 1840, and settled at Oulton Broads, where he appears to have played a variation upon the country gentleman, mixing more with tramps and Gypsies than with his more conventional neighbours. His interests were largely philological, and though languages seem to have had rather more of romantic than of scientific interest for him, his knowledge must have been extraordinarily copious and extensive, one of his publications actually consisting of metrical translations from thirty languages and dialects. He died in 1881, leaving behind him 'mountains of manuscript' which have not hitherto seen the light, and which his admirers await with some trepidation.

'Lavengro' and 'The Romany Rye,' though not the first of his works in order of publication, nor probably of composition, are, undoubtedly, a highly idealised account of his own early life. They are, like all his books, an *olla podrida* of many kinds, with a satisfactory and admirable preponderance of the good. How much is genuine autobiography and how much cunningly concocted fable must always, it is to be hoped, remain a mystery. For my part, I cannot pretend to say when Borrow is serious

—for I believe he is often serious—and when he is having his little joke, for he has a remarkable faculty for speaking soberly and discreetly with his tongue in his cheek. If it is impossible that all these things should have happened to him, it seems no less impossible that he should have made them up. How could any one make up such a story as that of the King of the Vipers, and are there, or were there ever to be met with, such persons as its narrator? Then there is the marvellous adventure of Sergeant Bagg, when he made a good attempt to hand over Jerry Grant to the quarter sessions, an attempt defeated by a storm which he considered 'not fair, but something Irish and supernatural'; there is the man who touched to keep off the evil chance; the footman who had advanced views on the drama and considered that 'Shakespeare culminated some time ago,' a prototype of the generation that will soon be upon us; the Welsh preacher who had committed the unpardonable sin—this last the hero of a truly fine piece of narrative—and others innumerable. But it is not until Lavengro has bought Jack Slingsby's cart and apparatus (Jack had been frightened off his beat by the Flaming Tinman), and has fairly taken the road as a

travelling tinker, that we get to the heart of the matter. An attempt upon his life by the old Gypsy, Mrs Hearne, who is not without a certain grotesque tragedy and whose motives are honourably conservative, is frustrated by the unpardonable sinner and his wife (a very pleasing young woman), and when, according to the old lady's reading of the laws controlling matter, Lavengro should be dead, and is actually discovered 'disputing about religion with a Welsh Methody' she hangs herself, a disappointed woman. Mr Jasper Petulengro, her son-in-law, though reasonable enough on the general subject of her decease, insists, as a point of honour, upon satisfaction with the 'naked morleys.' A few rounds satisfy him, being 'all that can reasonably be expected for an old woman who carried so much brimstone about her.'

Then comes the camping in 'Mumpers' Dingle,' and Lavengro's possession by the evil one, to be followed next day by the hardly less formidable Flaming Tinman. A combat ensues—short, but of the right quality, and we are introduced to the great Isopel Berners, a travelling acquaintance of the Tinman's, who officiates as Lavengro's second, while Grey Moll performs a like duty for his opponent. The turning point in the

struggle is reached when Isopel says that 'it's of no use flipping at the Flaming Tinman with your left hand,' and recommends 'Long Melford.' Long Melford does it, and the Tinman leaves the field with his mort Grey Moll, while Belle and Lavengro commence their strange intimacy. Isopel Berners is one of the bravest, freshest, and most charming of heroines, and her too short history constitutes one of the very finest idylls of the road. In no other relation does Borrow—and I abandon all attempt to separate him from Lavengro—show himself so human, though even here he proves himself something less or something more than a man. Isopel was born in the 'great house' of Long Melford, where she learnt 'to read and sew, to fear God, and to take her own part.' The principal detail of this last accomplishment is a swashing blow with the right, straight from the shoulder, to which she gives the expressive title of 'Long Melford,' there being 'nothing like it for shortness all the world over.' To the wandering maiden it had proved a safeguard as effectual in its way as the 'Erin's honour and Erin's pride' relied upon by the simpering young lady in the song. Isopel is, indeed, the prototype of the valiant young woman, now taking the world by storm, who

has grown dissatisfied with assurances that matters will go on very comfortably if she will only place implicit confidence in the honour and pride of her natural protector, and who has found something of exhilaration, and no loss of honour, or pride that is worth having, in taking her own part. In defiance of convention, Isopel and Lavengro now camp beside one another in the dingle, taking tea together regularly, a *ménage* strongly condemned by Mrs Chikno—the gypsy Mrs Grundy—as being of a character that she was determined not to ‘sanctify’ by social concessions. Others are less particular, or more charitable, and we get a little too much of the man in black, an emissary of Rome, who is rather a poor affair, though he certainly so far conveys the impression of a loathsome brute as to make us regret that the threat of the gentle Isopel to ‘break his glass against his mouth’ is not carried out. Mr and Mrs Petulengro make amends by paying a ceremonial visit, arrayed in the Roman fashion, in spite of the determined opposition of their relative Mrs Chikno, who goes so far as to suggest that the offer of a nobleman to marry Mrs Petulengro before she espoused her present husband—an offer which

is naturally a source of pride and occasional reminiscence to the lady—was, after all, 'in the roving and uncertificated line.' Mrs Petulengro's reply is sound. 'In whatever line it was,' said she 'the offer was a good one.' Then we come to that most curious incident when Lavengro sat under a hedge for three hours conversing with the gypsy girl Ursula, and making a not unsuccessful attempt to combine flirtation with moral vivisection, which resulted in surprises on both sides. 'A rum conversation it was,' as Mr Petulengro said, and he ought to know, as he had planned the meeting, and sat on the other side of the hedge all the time. I do not ask for anything better than the idea of Jasper, the baffled humorist, listening to the unexpected turns of that conversation. It is hard to escape his conclusion that Lavengro 'cared for nothing in the world but old words and strange stories,' and we may even go so far as to say that if Borrow had a full equipment of human emotions his reticence is one of the most astonishing of literary feats. In his cool way Lavengro seems to have been in love with Isopel, who is by far the most real and most pathetic of Borrow's characters. After some wooing of an uncon-

ventional kind, which consists mainly of dissertations on the Armenian language, he even offers marriage, which is declined for the singular reason that as he is mad—not an insuperable objection in itself—it is a point of honour with the proud workhouse girl not to take advantage of his infirmity. Lavengro accepts what he is pleased to consider the inevitable pretty easily—far too easily—for Isopel is decidedly the woman for whom to risk everything, and after a few decent fits of melancholy he takes the road gaily enough. He has the wanderer's temperament; the company of the roads is good enough for him—light come, light go, and no loss is irreparable. Certainly, a man who can sit on the shaft of his cart 'musing now on the structure of the Roman tongue, now on the rise and fall of the Persian power, and now on the powers vested in recorders at quarter sessions,' has within himself considerable recuperative resources.

By this time we are out of 'Lavengro' and into 'The Romany Rye,' which is not merely a sequel to, but a continuation of the former. Borrow actually played his readers the trick of stopping in the middle of an episode and taking up the thread after an interval of six years with-

out, so far as can be seen, the slightest explanation or apology. 'The Romany Rye' is much shorter than its predecessor, and the best praise that can be given to it is that it does not fall conspicuously below the former standard. The admirable sententious irony of Mr Petulengro enriches the earlier pages, while later we have a good assortment of eccentrics, and some capital horsey business. Perhaps, as a genuine oddity, the prize must be given to the old man who employed his abundant leisure in keeping melancholy at bay by the singular expedient of learning Chinese from the crockery he collected. In the course of thirty-five years he had acquired a fair proficiency in the tongue and an enormous amount of china. This is unusual enough, but the oddest thing about this old gentleman is that, through indolence, he had never learnt to tell the time. Looking at the clock, he admitted that he could 'give a guess to within a few minutes.' I suppose that most of us now flatter ourselves that we can tell the time pretty accurately, though there are still villages in Ireland without clock or watch, and yet one can look into a world where time does not much matter with fascination and envy.

'The Bible in Spain,' upon which with 'Lavengro,' Borrow's reputation mainly rests, seems to be, in the main, an authentic account of his adventures in Spain as an agent of the Bible Society. It was published in 1843, being preceded by 'The Gypsies in Spain,' which covers the same ground, but is specially devoted to what Mr Carlyle's maid-servant would call the 'fakes and manœuvres' of that body.

The *Edinburgh Review* for February, 1843, described 'The Bible in Spain' as 'something between Le Sage and Bunyan.' This is very well, but if we are to get at Borrow in this way, I should say something, also, of Hawthorne, a vast deal of John Bull, a little bit of Don Quixote, and a touch of Dugald Dalgetty.

We have various expedients now-a-days for putting the world right among which the distribution of Testaments to foreign peoples hardly holds its own, and though no one can help admiring Borrow's pluck, and it goes without saying that he believed firmly in the efficacy of his method, it would be difficult to determine the proportions of motive power in his zeal for the Christian religion, delight in a roving life, and desire to annoy the Pope of Rome. For the intrepid Borrow, his saddle-bags filled with

Testaments, faring forth into the wilds of Spain to fight the powers of darkness, is by no means the typical missionary. No obstacle daunts him on the work he sets himself to do, but he is always ready to turn aside for an odd character or a good bit of dialogue. His courage is not of a fantastic or of a conventionally heroic kind, and his simple narrative seems neither to exaggerate the dangers that he ran, nor with false modesty to minimise them. They are a matter of course, a part of the day's work, and he ventures into gloomy robber-haunted passes with a nonchalance which is perhaps derived in part from the confidence which his extraordinary immunity from mishap had given him. That he does not get his throat cut he attributes, with sincere piety, to the watchful care of God, though possibly under other conditions the fatalist philosophy of his guide that 'it was not so written' might have served him equally well. Pious though he is, he is buoyed up by no spiritual enthusiasm; he is merely a plain man doing his duty, a duty that is, on the whole, highly congenial to him. It would have been equally congenial, I am sure, to supply the Spaniards with good ale had such a mission been feasible, and he would have risked his life

for this cause with the same fortitude. We laugh at Borrow here as elsewhere, but it is with the happy laughter of pride and affection.

In the course of his travels he ran almost as many risks as St Paul, these ranging from apparent and measurable dangers to such incidents as that when, on a pitch dark night, in a district infested by murderous bandits, he heard the straining and gasping of men under a heavy burden, who crossed the road within a few feet of where he was halted. On another occasion, when on shipboard off Cape Finisterra, all hope was abandoned :—

‘We were now close to the rocks, when a horrid convulsion of the elements took place. The lightning enveloped us as with a mantle; the thunders were louder than the roar of a million cannon ; the dregs of the ocean seemed to be cast up, and in the midst of all this turmoil, the wind, without the slightest intimation, *veered right about*, and pushed us from the horrible coast faster than it had previously driven us towards it.’ It is no wonder that the oldest sailors on board acknowledged that they had never witnessed so providential an escape. What is of more importance to us, this incident was the cause of one of Borrow’s most entertain-

ing adventures. This was a characteristic expedition to Finisterra, to bestow his last remaining Testament upon the inhabitants of that remote region, in commemoration of his escape. The Quixotic element in his character here asserts itself, temporarily overpowering the Dugald Dalgetty. The roads were frightful, the country outlandish and dangerous, the destination almost unknown—a combination of circumstances which became almost ideal, when, by a happy chance, he acquired a guide quite after his own heart:—‘His face was very long, and would have borne some slight resemblance to a human countenance had the nose been more visible, for its place seemed to have been entirely occupied by a wry mouth and large staring eyes. His dress consisted of three articles—an old and tattered hat of the Portuguese kind, broad at the crown and narrow at the eaves; something which appeared to be a shirt, and dirty canvas trousers. Willing to enter into conversation with him, and remembering that the alquilador had informed me that he spoke languages, I asked him in English if he had always acted in the capacity of guide, whereupon he turned his eyes with a singular expression upon my face, gave a loud laugh, a long leap, and clapped his

hands thrice above his head. Perceiving that he did not understand me, I repeated my demand in French, and was again answered by the laugh, leap, and clapping. At last he said, in broken Spanish, "Master mine, speak Spanish, in God's name, I can understand you, and still better if you speak Gallegan, but I can promise no more. I heard what the alquilador told you, but he is the greatest embustero in the whole land, and deceived you then as he did when he promised to accompany you. I serve him for my sins, but it was an evil hour when I left the deep sea, and turned guide," adding, "When my master told you that I should bear you pleasant company by the way, it was the only word of truth that has come from his mouth for a month ; and long before you reach Finisterra you will have rejoiced that the servant, and not the master, went with you ; he is dull and heavy, but I am what you see." He then gave two or three first-rate summersets, again laughed loudly, and clapped his hands.' This strange person describes himself in a phrase of quite poetical exactness as 'a fellow who rides upon the clouds, and is occasionally whisked away by a gust of wind,' and confirms the impression of his fitness for a guide to Finisterra by a confiden-

tial acknowledgment that he had never heard of such a place, offering, however, to "push forward to Corcuvion, which is five mad leagues from hence." After a little time, "Do you think we shall reach Corcuvion to-night?" said I to the guide, as we emerged from this valley to a savage moor, which appeared of almost boundless extent.

"I do not. I do not. We shall in no manner reach Corcuvion to-night. I by no means like the appearance of this moor. The sun is rapidly sinking, and then if there comes on a haze, we shall meet the Estadèa."

"What do you mean by the Estadèa?"

"What do I mean by, the Estadèa? My master asks me what I mean by the Estadinha. I have met the Estadinha but once, and it was upon a moor, something like this. I was in company with several women, and a thick haze came on, and suddenly a thousand lights shone above our heads in the haze, and there was a wild cry, and the women fell to the ground screaming, "Estadèa! Estadèa!" and I myself fell to the ground crying out "Estadinha!" The Estadèa are the spirits of the dead which ride upon the haze, bearing candles in their hands. I tell you frankly, my master, that if

we meet the assembly of the souls, I shall leave you at once, and then I shall run and run till I drown myself in the sea, somewhere about Muros.”

‘Somewhere about Muros’ is good.

It throws some light upon Borrow’s disposition that it does not appear to have occurred to him to turn back from this unpromising expedition. He duly accomplished his mission, though the inhabitants of Finisterra came very near to shooting both him and his guide, being quite unable to conceive of any legitimate motive for the visit. The Spanish horses are almost as entertaining as the men. One pony was offered for sale by a soldier with the startling recommendation that ‘when he once commences running, nothing will stop him but the sea.’ For this redoubtable beast, about which Mr Swinburne ought to write a poem, the soldier asked two hundred and sixty dollars, and ‘no less.’

“That is a large sum,” said I.

“No *senor*, not at all, considering that he is a baggage pony, and belongs to the troop, and is not mine to sell.”

Borrow’s sojourn in the city was not free from striking episodes:—‘One of the ruffians of

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Madrid, called Manolos, came up to me one night in a dark street, and told me that unless I discontinued selling my "Jewish books," I should have a knife "nailed in my heart," but I told him to go home, say his prayers, and tell his employers that I pitied them.' In spite of such interruptions, Borrow managed to dispose of six hundred Testaments in the streets and alleys of Madrid, 'a fact which,' he says, 'I may be permitted to mention with gladness and decent triumph in the Lord.' His enemies seem to have been more malignant than powerful, and their momentary triumph in obtaining his committal to prison gave them small satisfaction, for he caused the authorities extreme embarrassment by refusing to come out again. He found that the prison offered a precious opportunity for 'making investigations in the robber language of Spain, a subject about which I had long felt much curiosity.'

'The Gypsies in Spain' was published in 1841, about two years before the 'Bible.' It need not be said that such a man as Borrow, a vagabond by choice, whose particular hobby was to ferret out peculiarities of language and race, should find much with which to sympathise in Gypsy life, and much to attract him in Gypsy

lore. His account of the Spanish Gypsies—casual, inexact, and picturesque—is not the least entertaining of his books. Judged by the standards of scientific philology, it may be deficient; for he is interested in curiosities rather than in essentials; but it gives a living impression of a strange and unique race. He actually ministered to their spiritual needs by the production of a Gypsy Gospel of St Luke, and employed Gypsies to aid him in the work of translation in order to maintain the idiom, a notable instance of thorough work. It is interesting to hear that this work enjoyed a great reputation as a charm against dangers and mischances, and was in particular request in this capacity upon thieving expeditions. Nor were Borrow's personal exhortations always attended with success of the kind anticipated:—'I spoke of the power of God, manifested in preserving them as a separate and distinct people among the nations until the present day. I warmed with my subject. I subsequently produced a manuscript book, from which I read a portion of the Scriptures, and the Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed, in Romany. When I had concluded, I looked around me. The features of the assembly were twisted, and the eyes of all turned upon me with a frightful

squint, not an individual present but squinted—the genteel Pépa, the good-humoured Chicharona, the Casdami, etc., etc. The Gypsy fellow, the contriver of the jest, squinted worst of all. Such are Gypsies.’

But if the morals of the Spanish Gypsies left a good deal to be desired, it is easy to believe that Borrow’s official or missionary desire that it should be otherwise could co-exist with a feeling akin to Mr Swinburne’s toward the Mary Stuart whom an infatuated school of historians are anxious to prove ‘innocent.’ I think that the Gypsy soldier had more attraction for Borrow than any quantity of smug converts could have had, and as his story is one of the finest narratives in the whole of the works we are considering, I shall venture to quote it at some length:—In person he is a kind of De Flores. ‘His eyes were small, and like ferrets, red and fiery; his complexion like a brick, chequered with spots of purple.’ He is racked by a horrible outrageous cough, the consequence, as he declares, of one of his numerous wounds—a shot through the lungs. This fantastic savage, proud of his Gypsy blood, improves Borrow’s acquaintance.

‘On the third day, as I was sitting down

to dinner, in he walked unannounced. I am rather hospitable than otherwise, so I cordially welcomed him to partake of my meal. "Con mucha gusto," he replied, and instantly took his place at the table. I was again astonished, for if his cough was frightful, his appetite was yet more so. He ate like a wolf of the sierra; soup, puchero, fowl, and bacon disappeared from before him in a twinkling. I ordered in cold meat, which he instantly despatched; a large piece of cheese was then produced. We had been drinking water.

"Where is the wine?" said he.

"I never use it," I replied.

'He looked blank. The hostess, however, who was present waiting, said, "If the gentleman wish for wine, I have a bota nearly full, which I will instantly fetch." The skin bottle, when full, might contain about four quarts. She filled him a very large glass, and was removing the skin, but he prevented her, saying, "Leave it, my good woman; my brother here will settle with you for the little I shall use."

'He now lighted his cigar, and it was evident that he had made good his quarters. On the former occasion I thought his behaviour sufficiently strange, but I liked it still less on the

present. Every fifteen minutes he emptied his glass, which contained at least a pint; his conversation became horrible; he related the atrocities which he had committed when a robber and brigand in La Mancha. "It was our custom," he said, "to tie our prisoners to the olive trees, and then, putting our horses to full speed, to tilt at them with our spears." As he continued to drink he became waspish and quarrelsome: he had hitherto talked Castilian, but he would now only converse in Gypsy and in Latin, the last of which languages he spoke with great fluency, though ungrammatically. He told me, that he had killed six men in duels; and, drawing his sword, fenced about the room. I saw, by the manner in which he handled it, that he was master of his weapon. His cough did not return, and he said it seldom afflicted him when he dined well. He gave me to understand that he had received no pay for two years. "Therefore you visit me," thought I. At the end of three hours, perceiving that he exhibited no signs of taking his departure, I arose, and said I must again leave him. "As you please, brother," said he, "use no ceremony with me. I am fatigued, and will wait a little while." I did not return till eleven at night,

when my hostess informed me that he had just departed, promising to return next day. He had emptied the bota to the last drop, and the cheese produced being insufficient for him, he had sent for an entire Dutch cheese on my account, part of which he had eaten and the rest carried away. I now saw that I had formed a most troublesome acquaintance, of whom it was highly necessary to rid myself, if possible; I therefore dined out for the next nine days. For a week he came regularly at the usual hour, at the end of which time he desisted; the hostess was afraid of him, as she said that he was a brujo or wizard, and only spoke to him through the wicket.

'On the tenth day I was cast into prison, where I continued several weeks. Once during my confinement he called at the house, and being informed of my mishap, drew his sword, and vowed with horrible imprecations to murder the Prime Minister, Ofalia, for having dared to imprison his brother. On my release I did not visit my lodgings for several days, but lived at an hotel. I returned late one afternoon with my servant Francisco, a Basque of Hernáni, who had served me with the utmost fidelity during my imprisonment, which he had voluntarily shared

with me. The first person I saw on entering was the Gypsy soldier, seated by the table, whereon were several bottles of wine which he had ordered from the tavern, of course on my account. He was smoking, and looked savage and sullen : perhaps he was not much pleased with the reception he had experienced. He had forced himself in, and the woman of the house sat in a corner, looking upon him with dread. I addressed him, but he would scarcely return an answer. At last he commenced discoursing with great volubility in Gypsy and Latin. I did not understand much of what he said. His words were wild and incoherent, and he repeatedly threatened some person. The last bottle was now exhausted—he demanded more. I told him in a gentle manner that he had drunk enough. He looked on the ground for some time, then slowly, and somewhat hesitatingly, drew his sword and laid it on the table. It was become dark. I was not afraid of the fellow, but I wished to avoid anything unpleasant. I called to Francisco to bring lights, and, obeying a sign which I made him, he sat down at the table. The Gypsy glared fiercely upon him. Francisco laughed, and began with great glee to talk in Basque, of which the Gypsy understood

not a word. The Basques like all Tartars—and such they are—are paragons of fidelity and good nature; they are only dangerous when outraged, when they are terrible indeed. Francisco, to the strength of a giant, joined the disposition of a lamb. He was beloved, even in the palio of the prison, where he used to pitch the bar, and wrestle with the murderers and felons, always coming off victor. He continued speaking Basque. The Gypsy was incensed; and, forgetting the language in which for the last hour he had been speaking, complained to Francisco of his rudeness in speaking any tongue but Castilian. The Basque replied by a loud carajáda, and slightly touched the Gypsy on the knee. The latter sprang up like a mine discharged, seized his sword, and, retreating a few steps, made a desperate lunge at Francisco. The Basques, next to the Pasiegos, are the best cudgel players in Spain, and in the world. Francisco held in his hand part of a broomstick, which he had broken in the stable, whence he had just ascended. With the swiftness of lightning he foiled the stroke of Chaléco, and in another moment, with a dexterous blow, struck the sword out of his hand, sending it ringing against the wall. The Gypsy resumed

his seat and his cigar. He occasionally looked at the Basque. His glances were at first atrocious, but presently changed their expression, and appeared to me to become prying and eagerly curious. He at last arose, picked up his sword, sheathed it, and walked slowly to the door; when there he stopped, turned round, advanced close to Francisco, and looked him steadfastly in the face, "My good fellow," said he, "I am a Gypsy, and can read *baji*. Do you know where you will be at this time to-morrow?" Then, laughing like a hyena, he departed, and I never saw him again.

'At that time on the morrow, Francisco was on his death-bed. He had caught the jail-fever, which had long raged in the *Cural de la Corte*, when I was imprisoned. In a few days he was buried, a mass of corruption, in the *Campo Santo* of Madrid.'

This splendid piece of writing is a good example of Borrow's method. It is a vivid glimpse of a strange, almost a tragic figure—superficial, isolated, inconsequent, and yet sufficient. Of the essential spirit, of the meaning of this man, we know nothing: of whence he comes and whither he goes, we care nothing.

In 'Wild Wales' (1862), the last of Borrow's

five popular books, we find him under changed conditions. He travels with a wife and step-daughter in a civilised manner, and has become, generally, a feasible person, with only occasional dashes into the wilds. As usual, he shows no sign of the burden of responsibility that weighs upon the literary artist, and there is more than enough of frivolity and even of puerility. It is one of his virtues that his narrative depends rather upon quality than point, but in this veritable chronicle of small beer there is sometimes neither style nor matter. Yet even this waste of realism is, in its degree, a genuine transcript from life, and this high old Tory gives us a fine sense of the brotherhood of man, not by the depth or breadth of his sympathies, still less by a high conception of justice derived from abstract reasoning, but by the pervading spirit of kindness and friendliness in relations that are slight and casual. To ask the road is an opportunity for fellowship, and the liking for a glass of good ale is the touch of nature in which he gladly recognises kinship with all the world worth considering.

There are few contributions of the first rank to the gallery of eccentrics, though we have a good one in a 'serious looking gentleman' with

a glass of 'something' before him, who occupied an inn-parlour. It appeared that this worthy believed in predestination, and was convinced that he himself would inevitably be damned, a circumstance which gave him a kind of 'gloomy consequence.' Borrow reasoned with him, not without a kind of success, for he left the unhappy man considerably annoyed at having had the worst of the argument.

'Wild Wales' is pitiless in its details. Every sixpence spent, every greeting uttered, every glass of ale drunk—and they are many—is deemed worthy of careful record. A fact is a fact for Borrow, and his appetite for these is insatiable and astounding. For example:—'It grew darker and darker. On I hurried along the road; at last I came to lone, lordly groves. On my right was an open gate and a lodge. The door was open, and in a little room I beheld a nice-looking old lady sitting by a table on which stood a lighted candle, with her eyes fixed on a large book: "Excuse me," said I, "but who owns this property?" The old lady looked up from her book, which appeared to be a Bible, without the slightest surprise, though I certainly came upon her unawares, and answered: "Mr John Wynn."' This is a complete incident

without relation or development. But though 'Wild Wales' is the mildest in flavour of Borrow's books, and, from the reader's point of view, a wife and daughter are as poor an exchange for Isopel Berners as the comparatively tame Welshmen for the Flaming Tinman and Mr Petulengro, there is very much in these excursions to the dwelling-places and burial-places of old Welsh bards that is of delightful quality. We feel some scepticism as to the surpassing merits of the bards, but none as to the enthusiasm of their lover, and if we cannot share the pleasure of his little triumphs in astonishing the natives by a knowledge of their history and antiquities surpassing their own, even as before we have condoned his harmless vanity in devising scenes for the display of his learning in Gypsy-lore and foreign tongues, these books are not for us. Borrow's child-like genius may easily be ridiculed by little men, and, indeed, it is impossible, as it is unnecessary, to maintain an attitude of strict reverence towards him. He seems to have no critical faculty worth mentioning, and consequently has no knowledge of his own strong points. He hates his critics to such purpose that he acknowledges having laid traps for them in the misspelling of

foreign words, in order that he might denounce their ignorance when they failed to discover the mistakes. In an appendix to the 'Romany Rye,' which is mainly a reply to criticisms on 'Lavengro,' he reviews this work in a manner in which irrelevance, complacency, and fatuity are agreeably mingled, informing us in an exquisite passage that it was undertaken 'for the express purpose of inculcating virtue,' and other nice things, 'for awakening a contempt for nonsense of every kind, and a hatred for priest-craft, more especially that of Rome.' It is hardly too much to say that all his roads lead to Rome, 'the machinations of Rome' being, in his view, the principal hindrance to human progress. He hates the Pope with a fine old British hatred, and veils his fear of the Jesuits with the most insulting contempt. As to Frenchmen, he admits that since the decay of pugilism it is no longer true, as it was conspicuously true in its palmy days, that one Englishman is a match for two of them, but this apparent concession seems to be for the temporary purpose of glorifying the noble art, of which he writes with fine enthusiasm on one page, while on the next we may read of a revivalist preaching which he has followed with reverence and attention.

Happily the time has passed for these antipathies to be taken seriously as matters for regret and irritation, and we may now take a mild pleasure in these antiquities of feeling.

Mr Saintsbury has declared that Borrow has 'flashes of ethical reflection which, though, like all ethical reflections, often one-sided, are of the first order of insight.' I confess that I cannot recall any examples, and I almost think that I should be sorry to find them. Certainly he had a good stock of working virtues, but he seems to me seldom to get nearer to ethical reflection than somewhat facile rhapsody, just as violent prejudice is commonly as far as he travels on the road of passion. It is less difficult to find passages that are one-sided. He says, 'In regard to conscience, be it permitted to observe that it varies much according to climate, country, and religion; perhaps nowhere is it so terrible and strong as in England; I need not say why.' If this is one of Mr Saintsbury's 'flashes,' we might go on to claim for him a critical method on the strength of such references as that to 'a most extraordinary genius, some of whose productions possess merit of a very high order.'

It seems almost time to say a good word for

him in whose honour this paper is compiled, or I must justify myself by a theory that a combination of faults and absurdities may make up a meritorious whole; and even now I must begin with something like depreciation. In any scheme of liberal education Borrow is decidedly an 'extra.' He solves for us no problems of the universe; he makes no appeal to our deepest tragic emotions nor to our finest sense of comedy; he has little grasp of character, and we know his people only by some salient point; nor has he the habit of introspective analysis that might give us something of the fashionable 'human document.' His temper is romantic; the order and beauty of the world appeal to him less than its strangeness. He is hardly a great literary artist, and his style, like his matter, is varied and unequal. His humour, sly rather than subtle, and with an old-fashioned flavour that adds to its piquancy, finds expression in much good and even fine dialogue. Mr George Milner, a warm admirer of Borrow, describes him as 'an egotist pure and simple,' and attributes much of his success to this thorough-going audacity of egotism. It is an egotism without qualms, natural with the nature of primitive man, unvexed with the compromises

of social conditions. It is this which gives to his narrative style, founded to some extent on Defoe, a directness and naïveté that can deal with extraordinary incidents without forcing the note. He takes us to the region of oddities, where the normal would be the surprising.

What then, is the meaning and value of Borrow to us? I recall what Mr Pater has said of Wordsworth—that his function is ‘not to teach lessons, or to enforce rules, or even to stimulate to noble ends; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man’s existence which no machinery affects.’ What Borrow can do for us is not so great, so high an office; it is, indeed, almost the converse of this, being, as I take it, rather to liberate us for a time from thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls; to take us from all our immensities and profundities to a good old-fashioned adventurous world, with some mystery and a good deal of madness in it—to show us how much of fine and varied life may be gathered on the surface—to turn us once and again from the strenuous moderns, with their almost intolerable burdens of moral and artistic responsibility, to

take refuge in the shallow and the quaint—to play for us a diversion that may help us to forget the shadow of the ultimate tragic facts of human life.

I am prepared to hear that Borrow had really an adequate and profound philosophy of life, but if it is so, I rejoice to have escaped it. His mosaic of queer little bits will hardly make a 'placid and continuous whole.' And yet he is no mere fantastic personage. Taking hold of things at first hand, as he did, he pierced through conventions to a basis of reality. He liked this life of the roads better than any other, and though he calls on us sometimes with complacency to marvel at the extraordinary taste that prefers the society of Gypsies and pugilists to that of the bourgeois, he knew what was good for him. In the art, the literature, the political questions of his time, he took curiously little interest; he had not a deep and full appreciation of earth or man; but he lived his own life in his own way; he was a valiant and patriotic Englishman, and he wrote what will not be superseded and should not be forgotten.

TURGENIEFF

'THE Russian Novel,' wrote Matthew Arnold in 1887, 'has now the vogue and deserves to have it.' Tolstoi was his theme, and then and since the vogue has been mainly the vogue of Tolstoi. The others have had but the crumbs that fall from his table. And yet ten years before Arnold wrote on Tolstoi Mr James had declared of Turgenieff that he took 'a view of the great spectacle of human life more general, more impartial, more unreservedly intelligent, than that of any novelist we know.'

Whatever may be the opinions of critics, Turgenieff, who was the first of the Russians to make a mark in England, has been superseded in popular esteem, or in popular demand, by his great rival. Perhaps their relative positions in the book-market are determined by circumstances with which their literary quali-

ties have little to do. Both are great novelists, but Tolstoi is something besides. All liberal minds have been greatly interested and greatly moved by the man who, in simple earnestness, can accept the command to sell all that he has and give to the poor. Personalities count for a good deal with a people so generally inartistic as ourselves, and here is a great personality. In the conditions of publication too, Tolstoi has been fortunate, though these may be as much the effect of popularity as its cause. His books are procurable in a well known and uniform English edition, capably translated, whereas Turgenieff can be obtained only in shreds and patches, and if some of the versions seem satisfactory enough, others are evidently somewhat casual. One has to brave the coloured boards of the railway novel and to accept the peculiar orthography which we shall hate all the more when the Americans have completely justified it. Turgenieff may be read in French, however; in some instances the versions are his own; but despite the supercilious assumptions of some critics that all capable novel readers read French, and whatever may be the commercial prospects of such an enterprise, there could be few more interesting ventures for a publisher

than a good English edition of Turgenieff's novels.

I do not believe that he could ever attain a popularity of the wide and shallow kind, but to the increasing number who bring a little taste and intelligence to their reading his merits should be convincing and stimulating. He does not, indeed, meet our national demand for amusement tempered with morality, for he is not in any casual and superficial sense, amusing, he is never facetious, and his morality wears so stern a face that we can hardly recognise its kinship to the aspiration towards comfort which we sometimes call by the same name. He has, however, one or two popular qualities; he is a very clear writer, and his subject matter has still to most of us the charm of strangeness.

Perhaps we have not yet fully realised the historical significance of the novel. More and more we shall ask for a history of society, rather than for a chronicle of events; more and more we shall require to realise a period by its typical life. The historian of the future will have to read the novels of his period—an alarming prospect for the post-Victorian age. Turgenieff's novels will be an invaluable record of the relations of proprietors to peasants, and, indeed of the

whole social fabric of Russian life, and at a period of special interest and importance. He was born in 1818 and died in 1883, so that about 1861, the year of the emancipation of the serfs, he was at the height of his literary activity, and most of his books were written in the light of that event. His earliest publications, however, following the usual schoolboy's tragedy, were two volumes of poems by which he gained the approval of Byéliniski the Russian critic. Turgenieff himself viewed these efforts modestly, for when an admirer, with the modern passion for overdoing things thoroughly, applied for a copy of the early scarce work for critical purposes, the great man replied that 'he knew nothing about the old rubbish.'

An artist who is strong enough to excel, if not independent of opportunity, asks for no more than his share. Nevertheless the quality and direction of the characters of a novel, must receive a determining influence from the society of which they are the offspring. The society of Thackeray's novels or of Balzac's may well produce more potent individuals and more serious combinations, than the society of Miss Austen's. And perhaps there was never a better opportunity for the production of strong

d'un Chasseur' we read of a proprietor—a man of ideas, who tries to substitute nettles for flax, to feed his pigs upon mushrooms, and who 'having read an article in a Moscow paper one day on the high morality in the villages, he decreed that everyone should learn this by heart, and should recite it frequently,' and also 'for order and regularity,' required that each of his subjects should have a number, and that he should carry it upon the collar of his coat. Every time a peasant met his master he cried: 'No. 21, or No. 7,' and the master replied: 'God preserve you.' Between peasants and masters we find such an overseer as is described in 'Fathers and Sons': 'a tall thin man with a crafty eye, a soft and honied voice,' who 'replied to every observation of Nicholas Petrovich with an "assuredly! without any doubt," and was always trying to represent the peasants as drunkards and thieves.'

In this social turmoil Turgenieff seems to seek, and often to seek in vain, the ruling spirit whose work will endure. Bazarof in 'Fathers and Sons' is, of all his characters, the freshest and strongest. The book was published in 1862, the year after the emancipation of the serfs, and as its title denotes it deals with two

generations of this time of change. It is not a work of elaborate construction. The principal persons in the story are presented with extreme delicacy and precision and with a naïve directness that fixes our attention. We quickly see them as types and every touch adds to their individuality. Two elderly brothers, Nicholas and Paul Petrovich, are living in retirement on the estate of the former when Arcadi, Nicholas' son, returns from the university at the termination of his student's career, bringing with him Bazarof, his friend and fellow-student. Bazarof, a character of extraordinary force and distinction, is a materialist, a physiologist with a complete faith in physiology and a contempt for everything indefinite. 'What is of importance,' he says, 'is that two and two make four,' and he declares that 'nature is not a temple but a workshop.' He is described as a Nihilist, and it is said, though the point is disputed, that this was the introduction of the word into Russian literature. His nihilism does not find outward expression in explosive bombs, and though the proportions between egotism and altruism in his character are not crudely defined, it is one of the surprises of the book that, in spite of his brutalities, the reader begins to perceive that he

is, at bottom, a good fellow. Opposed to him is Paul Petrovich, a refined and punctilious noble of exquisite habits and manners, filled with romantic and aristocratic traditions. As to Arcadi, the son of the house, he is an amiable, but commonplace young man, full of enthusiasm for his friend, and thirsting for opportunities to display his heterodoxy. Thus, when his father begins, with some embarrassment, to explain the presence in his house of Fenitchka, a girl whom he has taken for his mistress, Arcadi, in place of the remonstrances that his father dreads, adopts an attitude of benignant approval. Convenient as this is at the time, it disturbs the old man's ideas of the fitness of things. It soon becomes apparent to the brothers Paul and Nicholas that they are superannuated—the bitterest of reflections for intelligent men. “I do all I can to keep up with the age,” says Nicholas. “I read, I study, and make every effort to be on a level with the wants of the country, and they say that my song is sung. After all it is very possible they are right.” Their situation is pitiable; they have, as they think, gone with the times; they have resisted the conservatism of age and look for appreciation of their enlightened conduct; but they find their moderate liberalism

hopelessly distanced. Bazarof and his docile pupil do not even take them seriously. Paul, however, will not be brushed aside. He tries a fall with Bazarof but is bewildered by his negations. The old loose ideas have no common ground with a creed that begins and ends with physics. Nor can the younger man sympathise with an attitude which is typified by that of a certain government official who prides himself, 'that none of the phenomena of social life escaped his observation,' and who 'even followed the literary movement, but affected to do it with a majestic condescension as a man of ripe age sometimes follows in the street for some minutes a procession of young rascals.' This weak and sham liberalism is to be met with everywhere. Bazarof and Arcadi pay a visit to a provincial town and meet there Sitnikof, another of the feeble and silly persons whom powerful and original men carry in their train. He proposes a visit to a lady of his acquaintance, an 'emancipated' woman. "She lives, you understand, separate from her husband, and is quite independent."

"Is she pretty?" asked Bazarof.

"No, I cannot say she is."

"Then why the devil should you take us to see her?"

Hearing that she will give them champagne, Bazarof consents to go. Sitnikof and the emancipated lady proceed from one extravagance to another, while even Arcadi is scandalised, and Bazarof devotes himself to the champagne, which, under the circumstances, appears the most temperate course. It is a masterly scene, keenly and bitterly ironical.

Bazarof is a strong man, but he is human. Against his will he falls in love with Madame Odintsof a great lady whom he visits. Her portrait is remarkable for its reticences, and in the hands of a lesser artist she would be sentimentalised. As it is she remains subsidiary, an important element in Bazarof's life, though by no means without an interest of her own. It is the drama of the man deeply moved and the cold woman nearly roused.

But of all the contrasts in which the book abounds, none is more striking than that of the terrible Bazarof with his poor old parents. The father poses before the son as a man of the world with broad scientific views, and is found at night prostrated before an image praying for that son. The mother with her quaint and careful habits, her pride and affection toward her graceless son, her superstitions and her piety,

makes a figure entirely beautiful. Though Bazarof is not willingly unkind to them he finds their company irksome and returns with Arcadi to his father's house. There he is forced into a duel by Paul on the alleged ground that he had 'expressed himself in my presence in an improper manner on the subject of Sir Robert Peel,' which is surely a reminiscence of the man who spoke disrespectfully of the equator. The duel has no fatal results, but it drives Bazarof away. Then he parts with Arcadi, dismissing that rosewater revolutionist in a superb and characteristic speech. "Our dust reddens your eyes, our mire soils you; truly you are not of our height; you admire yourself complacently, you take pleasure in reproaching yourself; all that bores us; we have other things to do than to admire or to reproach ourselves; we must have the others broken on the wheel."

Bazarof returns to his home, and lives quietly for a while with his parents. They are happy to have him there, and with intuitive devotion they almost efface themselves lest they should annoy him. Suddenly their sky is overcast. Bazarof cuts his hand during an operation. The wound is slight, but it is fatal. The story resolves itself into the struggle of a man of

vital energy and undaunted mind with death :— ‘Bazarof remained lying down all the rest of the day, and passed the night in a heavy and fatiguing state of drowsiness. Opening his eyes with difficulty, towards one o'clock in the morning, he saw, by the light of the night lamp, the pale face of his father, who was at his bedside, and he begged him to retire; the old man obeyed, but re-entered almost immediately on tiptoe, and cowering behind the half open door of a closet, continued to watch his son. Arina Vlassievna, too, did not go to bed; she came every moment to the door of the room to listen to Eniousha's breathing, and to assure herself that Vasili Ivanovitch was still at his post. She could only distinguish her husband's broad, bowed back; but that sufficed to tranquillise her a little. Bazarof tried to get up when it was day: he was taken with dizziness, soon followed by bleeding from the nose, and he went to bed again without delay. Vasili Ivanovitch assisted him in silence; Arina Vlassievna approached and asked him how he felt. “I am better,” he replied, turning to the wall. Vasili Ivanovitch signed to his wife with both hands to withdraw, she bit her lips to keep herself from crying, and went out. Everything in the house seemed in

some way to be darkened, every face was lengthened, a strange silence reigned, even in the yard; they sent off to the village a crowing cock, which must have been remarkably surprised by such a proceeding. Bazarof remained in bed, with his face turned to the wall. Vasili Ivanovitch spoke to him several times, but his questions annoyed the sick man, and the old man remained motionless in his chair, wringing his hands from time to time. He went into the garden for a few minutes, and stood there immovable as a statue; he seemed under the shock of an unheard of astonishment (the expression of surprise hardly left his face), then he returned to his son, seeking to avoid his wife. She succeeded at last in seizing him by the hand, and asking him in a convulsed, almost menacing tone. "What is the matter with him?" Vasili Ivanovitch to reassure her, tried to smile, but to his own astonishment, it was a burst of laughter that came from his lips.' Their prayers and solitudes are in vain. Bazarof dies, and his father, maddened with grief, cries out in rebellion against this visitation of God. But the mother, 'all in tears hung on his neck, and they fell together, with their faces to the ground, like two lambs in the heat of the day.'

Thus the strong Russian—the man who was capable of great things—is no better than the weakest. He has done nothing, but his power is not less manifest. Turgenieff's incurable pessimism forbids a more fortunate ending. We have to content ourselves with Arcadi's conversion to a hero of the beaten track. He marries a charming girl, gives up nihilism, and settles down as a careful cultivator of his estate.

In Bazarof we see a great power wasted; in 'Dimitri Roudine,' published six years before 'Fathers and Sons,' we see a great impulse wasted.

'Dimitri Roudine' is the most dramatic of Turgenieff's books, and Roudine is absolutely in the first rank of typical characters. His place is with Don Quixote and Sir Willoughby Patterne. Like Sir Willoughby he is drawn from the inmost depths of generic man. He is at once individual, national, and universal. His conception is so refined that he seems unique: he is in reality a perfect specimen of an universal type. We see him first as a chance visitor at the house of a great lady. Brilliant, fervid, and eloquent, he takes her and her household by storm. Nor are his effects wholly evanescent, for the enthusiasm and loyalty of Bassistoff, the poor

tutor, are never dimmed. But he has no depth of feeling or passion; he is unstable, and, in the deepest sense, insincere, and yet he is unchangeable, in that his impulses spring from a perennial source. Leschnieff, an old fellow-student whom he meets after a separation of many years—a strong, undemonstrative, effective man—the restful character in the story, is proof against his influence. “It is not that he is futile,” says this good, but as yet not wholly charitable man, “we are all that more or less. I say nothing about his being a tyrant at heart, idle, half-educated, liking to live at other people’s expense, etc.—what is really serious is that he is as cold as ice.”’

What favourable judgment can be formed of a man who neglects his mother, borrows money without the prospect of repaying it, estranges his friends, puts his hand to no useful labour, and perpetually pours forth a stream of talk? He gets into some curious straits. He robs a man of his sweetheart, and when the poor devil is still smarting, visits him to expatiate on his pure motives and to sentimentalise generally. But the other is angry and hurt and can’t understand this at all—tells him to go to the deuce, and wants to fight—is quite bewil-

dered at this meaningless magnanimity. It is a scene of perfect comedy though quite without the unction that we associate with comedy. Yet Roudine is not really in love, or he is like the churchman mentioned by Newman who could not make up his mind whether he believed a certain doctrine or not. He cannot bridge the chasm between cause and will; his actions run to seed in speech; he stimulates his feelings with a burning eloquence, and falls away at the first check.

His character is a marvel of observation. It is all so subtle and seems so simple. The course of the story has displayed him perfectly. We feel for him the appropriate emotions of pity and contempt; the storms that he set in motion have subsided; the young people whom he disturbed are happy again, and *au diable* to him. Observation, however, is only the basis of Turgenieff's art, imagination is its essence. Above all he is a dramatist. Leschnieff, who had judged Roudine most harshly, remembers him most kindly. He pronounces a farewell speech to his memory, full of kindness and appreciation, and replying to the baser taunts, he says:—"He does not live on other people like a parasite, but like a child."

Then in an epilogue, years after the action of the story ends, Leschnieff meets Roudine again. Chance brings them together at an hotel in a provincial town. Leschnieff is a happy and prosperous man, Roudine is prematurely old, shabby, and sad. Dispirited and worn out as he is, the lamp of his enthusiasm burns low. Leschnieff prevails upon him to tell the history of his life since they parted. It is the old tale of fruitless endeavour. He still wanders over the earth pursuing the phantoms of his brain, striving with fore-doomed futility to become a man of action and to institute practical reforms, and never for a moment swerving from his own standard. We see him at last with the eyes of the wise and just Leschnieff—an object for pity, but more for respect. Depth of feeling has been denied him, but the high strenuous fervour of the mind has resisted all encroachments of faintness or sensuality. “Thou wilt not deny,” he says to Leschnieff, “that I have always had high aims.”

They eat and drink together, they touch glasses and sing the old student song, and then they separate for ever. We have again a last glimpse of Roudine dying gallantly and uselessly on a Paris barricade.

What would result if Roudine's fervour and Leschnieff's solid virtues were united in the same person? This is a question that we may ask in vain. In 'Virgin Soil,' published as recently as 1877, we have again a hero of the ineffectual kind. Turgenieff himself speaks of Neshdanof as the Russian Hamlet. It is a Hamlet of Goethe's imagining who 'sinks beneath a burden that he cannot bear, and must not cast away.' He is the artist forced into a path—a path from which he may not withdraw for it is a difficult and dangerous one. It is his part to rouse the peasants to revolt. He succeeds only in getting drunk with them. The regeneration of mankind is not too great an object for him. His accomplishment is suicide.

Besides Neshdanof 'Virgin Soil' contains a whole gallery of strong and original portraits. Foremost among them is Markelof, a proprietor who devotes himself to the redemption of the serfs. He is incapable of understanding the temper of the people and the nature of the problem. His attempt at revolt is a fiasco. His peasants think him mad, seize him, and deliver him to the authorities. His whole life has been wretched beyond expression; nothing prospers with him, for his judgment is always at

fault. He fails in love, and Neshdanof his comrade is his successful rival. Neshdanof is the natural son of an aristocrat, and in a scene of startling poignancy the noble-minded Markelof, stung by countless irritations makes the astonishing speech:—

“It is not a question of merit, or of extraordinary qualities—moral or physical—no! It is merely the good luck, the cursed good luck of those damned bastards.” I have separated this passage from the scene of which it is the culmination because it seems so fine an example of Turgenieff’s power. It is so natural, so unexpected; it seems such an impossible thing for Markelof to say, it makes us pity him so immensely and see him so clearly. Yet in spite of its tragic elements ‘Virgin Soil’ has more of hope in it than others of Turgenieff’s books. Solomine the factory manager, a strong and earnest man, marries a pure and earnest woman, and wherever they may be we look, if not for a revolution, at least for good and wholesome work.

There is, too, an excellent light character—Pakline, invaluable to the general effect, and to him we owe a very charming interlude :

“Imagine an oasis. Neither politics, nor literature, nor anything belonging to the

present day ever penetrates there. A little swell front house, such as is to be found nowhere else; the whole atmosphere of the place is rococo; the people themselves are rococo; the very air which you breathe is rococo; everything you see is rococo; Catherine II, powder, hoops, the eighteenth century personified! As for the master and mistress of this house—picture to yourself two little old people, very, very old! husband and wife! of the same age, and unwrinkled; plump, round, neat, real love-birds; and their kindness amounts to folly, to saintliness—their kindness is unlimited! You will tell me that unlimited kindness is often joined to a want of moral sense; but I can't enter into these subtleties. I only know one thing, that my little old couple are the very best of good people! They have never had any children—lucky mortals! In the town they are called the blessed, or the fools, or the innocents, whichever you prefer. They both wear the same costume—a striped cloak, made of a firm material not found elsewhere. They are astonishingly alike; the only difference between them is that she wears a cap, and he a "Kolpak," with ruffles like those on the cap, but without a bow of ribbon. This ribbon bow is the only thing

which distinguishes them from each other, the husband having no beard. He is called Fomoushka, and she Fimoushka. I assure you it would be worth paying to see them. They are incredibly fond of each other; they welcome anyone who comes to see them, and play off all their graces for them!"

I must find room for one trait of these old-world people, so curiously stationary in this seething world:—"On one point only they departed from the old customs: never, on any account, had they prosecuted or punished anyone. When one of their people was convicted of being a drunkard or a downright thief, they bore it long and patiently—as one endures bad weather—before making up their minds to get rid of him, to find him a place with someone else. "Let everyone take his turn," they would say. "It is time someone else should bear with him now," which seems to indicate a reasonable compromise in dealing with the criminal classes.

In 'Virgin Soil' we have enough of impostors such as the sham revolutionary Goloushkin and the sham liberal Sipiagin with his exquisitely unpleasant wife, but we must turn to 'Smoke' for its author's fullest exposi-

tion of the follies of his countrymen. It is a story of the seduction of a lover by a brilliant, unstable woman. It is crowded with foolish clamorous persons who are treated with too much irony for entire truthfulness. We might comfort ourselves with the analogy that as the hero Litvinof settles down sedately at last with the right woman, so Russia will one day see that steady work, and not frothy talk, is the road of progress. Almost the only man with any pretensions to sense, a certain Potoughine gives the note of the book—a note that seems unlikely to help Turgenieff to gain the affections of his fellow-countrymen:—“Last spring, I visited the Crystal Palace at London; in that building, as you know, are collected specimens of all kinds of inventions; it is, so to speak, an encyclopedia of humanity. As I was walking among all those machines and implements, and gazing at all the statues of great men about me, this thought came into my mind: if any nation were suddenly to disappear from the surface of the globe, and if, at the same time, everything which this nation had invented were to vanish from this building, our dear good mother, orthodox Russia might bury herself in Tartary, without making the slightest disturb-

ance. Everything would remain quietly in its place; for the *samovar*, the bark shoes, and the knout—our most important productions, these even were not invented by us. The disappearance of the Sandwich Islands would produce more effect; their inhabitants have designed certain lances and canoes; their absence would be noticed by the visitors. All our early inventions came from the East, all our late ones from the West, and still we continue to dilate on the originality of our art and our national productions. Some young philosophers have even discovered a Russian science, a Russian arithmetic. Two and two make four here as elsewhere, but more completely, it appears.”’

But Potoughine is an embittered man—too good a hater to be quite a fair judge. Perhaps Turgenieff, truthful observer though he is, may not always be trusted in his application when he is concerned with the wrongs his country suffers from her own sons. Irony is too often his weapon, and irony, though it may serve the cause of truth, is a departure from its rule. Nor do we find the simplicity of truth in the description of ‘a woman so old that she caused a constant feeling of apprehension among those looking at her, lest

she should at any moment crumble into dust.' It has a certain rude imaginative force, but the following shows more of his power:—'In her youth she had led a very dissipated life; in her old age she retained only two passions—the love of dainties and the love of cards. When her appetite was satiated, and when she was not playing cards or talking nonsense, her countenance rapidly assumed an almost death-like expression. She would sit and gaze and breathe, but it was plain that there was not a single idea stirring in her mind.' Here in few words we realise the awfulness of a life that is separated from death only by an appetite, and a frivolity. This is from 'Liza, or a Nest of Nobles,' known in England by Mr Ralston's translation. It is a simple and beautiful story, perhaps the most tranquil of all. The description of Lavretaky's return to his birthplace, his reception by the old servants, and the quiet country life there, is one of the passages about which lovers of literature will not disagree. Old Anton the serving man is fit to stand by Caleb Balderstone, though even he is hardly so impressive a figure as the speechless old peasant who stood by Markelof's door.

If, after reading Turgenieff's longer books—

none of them is long—a reader's spirits are unimpaired, the shorter stories remain. If there are yet a few persons too fatuously cheerful to be in sympathy with their environment, here is their opportunity. 'Polished little pieces of misery,' Mr James calls them, not without reason. If ever it is permissible that the impression of the art of the narrative should overpower the impression of life, such a tale—it is hardly a tale—as the 'Journal d'un Homme de trop' is that special case. It seems hardly worth having on other terms. It is not only that the man dies lonely and wretched, forced as a refuge from ennui to chronicle the *bêtises* of a life that has failed at every point, but that he loses his last friend, he loses the sympathy of the reader. To us also he is *de trop*, and he strains our faith in the discretion of his author. It is not sad, it is dismal. Again in 'Toc-toc-toc,' a tragi-comedy, in which, as Mr Meredith would say, 'the comic in their natures led by interplay to the tragic issues,' we find an abuse of coincidence to bring about, or at least to enforce a rather superfluous casualty. And yet, if it is superfluous, all is superfluous, except beauties of detail. The courses of these stories are, in their main lines, often obvious enough.

It is the particular shade of meaning, the quality of the action that matters. And if more artistically compact, they have sometimes a touch of artifice from which the longer books, with their larger view of life, are free.

To English readers the 'King Lear of the Steppe' must always possess an initial attraction. He is a bold man, who, with 'Lear' and 'Le Père Goriot' before him attempts a variation of the theme. It was, perhaps, too seductively miserable an one for Turgenieff to resist. Kharlof, a giant in size and strength, and a man of phlegmatic though imperious temper, receives, as he thinks, warning of his approaching death. He determines to make over his property to his two daughters, which he does in a ceremonial scene, the decorum of which is marred only by the jeers of a hanger-on, a kind of buffoon, who foretells Kharlof's calamities. The Fool of this Lear is indeed a 'bitter fool.' The calamities—slights, injuries, outrages, follow in course, and Kharlof accepts them without reprisals, for his spirit is broken. At last he is driven from the house, but he is rescued by friends who seek to shelter and solace him; again the buffoon appears and his taunts prevail. Then Kharlof has his moment of triumph. He is permitted a

last debauch of passionate power. He returns to the home from which he has been driven and proceeds to demolish it with his own hands. His daughters look on, and the peasants gather together, half stupefied and yet with a kind of approval, for, as they mutter among themselves, he had received injustice. They think it a strange proceeding, but they shake their heads and say that certainly he had received injustice. Kharlof's triumph is not only a physical one. Though there is no Cordelia, it is not quite unmitigated Goneril and Regan. Evlampia, his youngest daughter, is a curious study. She has remained unmoved by her father's sufferings, but the hour of his strength and fury subdues her. Cruel and sensual, an appeal to her feelings is vain, but there is yet access to her imagination. She is a sensualist with a passion for the pride of power stronger than the senses. Kharlof dies with her name on his lips, but whether his words are a curse or a blessing no one can say.

Perhaps of all Turgenieff's work, 'The Brigadier,' a short sketch of extreme simplicity, makes the most direct impression. We are shown an old officer, poor as a rat and half imbecile, living out the residue of his life in

obscure privation. He has a history; he has ruined himself for a woman whose portrait he keeps and whose grave he visits devoutly. So reticently is he displayed that we can hardly guess whether some remnants of his passion remain or whether he clings to the habits, born of the passion, which have outlasted its spirit. He never becomes intelligible; once or twice by glimpses, something of his former self is revealed, faint flashes suggesting a man of gallantry and address, but the darkness closes again upon him. We have learnt the details of his story; we digest them at his grave. Nothing can be simpler than the incidents and their narration, but through them we receive an apprehension of the tragic issues of loss and decay. Here is the function of great art. It is not to set down facts, not even an effective arrangement from facts. It is to arouse a kindred imagination. Yet Turgenieff himself has said:—"I have never attempted to "create an image," without having for my point of departure not an idea, but a living being around which I gathered and assembled by degrees all the befitting elements. So it was with 'Fathers and Sons.' As the ground work of its chief character, Bazarof, I took a young

country doctor whose personality had struck me.'

It is inevitable that comparisons should be made between Turgenieff and Tolstoi, though they do not fall easily into crisp and telling antithesis. On the contrary they have much in common. Both have their feet firmly planted on the ground—observation, careful and thoughtful observation, is the foundation on which they rely. As an observer it seems to me that Tolstoi is more thorough, more competent, he gives the texture of life more completely than any other writer. It is easy to talk of the photographic details of the realist, but Tolstoi is very much more than a photographer, unessential though some of his details may be; his observations do not stop at the surface; he notes all phases and variations of the feelings and of the mind. He has the scientific imagination rather than the artistic one, and his great work 'War and Peace,' has something of the effect of an original scientific treatise. His discovery is worthy of the age of democracy for it is no less than that armies lead their generals, peoples their rulers. It opens our eyes, as it opens the eyes of an ignoramus in science to read 'The Origin of Species.' To

such formulas as the 'survival of the fittest,' or the 'conservation of energy' we are ready to add such an one as 'the persistence of masses.'

The typical history which the novel supplies gains in significance if it is established that the prominent individuals, the Bonapartes and the Cæsars, are not really the propelling forces that they seem to be. There is no great man in Tolstoi's books, for he has never seen a great man. He has no character so forcible as Bazarof, though some as real and human. If he had met the 'young country doctor,' around which Turgenieff gathered the 'befitting elements,' he would have described him as he was. If Tolstoi were nothing more, he would be a storehouse of truthful notes, invaluable to future novelists. He has seldom gathered his innumerable observations into types. Perhaps he does not believe in types. There is a passage in 'The Cossacks,' in which the death of three soldiers is described, and as they lie on the ground he tells us that each face has its own peculiar expression. This is what Tolstoi has done, and has done better than anyone; he has given to each face its own peculiar expression. So we may make the distinction that Tolstoi gives a direct transcript from Nature, so that

'what it loses in art it gains in reality,' while Turgenieff, in the compromise between what is perceived and what is imagined, gives to imagination a larger share. This is not to say that either method is wrong; the world would be infinitely poorer if criticism could determine a mean of expression and prevail upon all authors to adopt it. Nor should it be supposed that Turgenieff can be entirely acquitted of chronicling irrelevances. In the first paragraph of 'Fathers and Sons,' he introduces a servant with 'chubby cheeks, small dull eyes, and a round chin covered with a colourless down.' How far is this intrusion of pictorial detail necessary or allowable? The servant plays no part in the story; his chubby cheeks will not re-appear; such details are only accumulations, the essential details are growths. Nevertheless a novel that carries no irrelevancies has the effect of a mechanical contrivance or of a mathematical puzzle. Charles Lamb declared that a pun 'is the better for not being perfect in all its parts. What it gains in completeness, it loses in naturalness,' and the same criticism applies to more serious work. The feeling of life is not obtained by complete co-relation. Art must not be too artful: it must not over-

power the expression of life. The first impression of a novel should be of life, its final and lasting impression should be of life. The standard of relevance and coherence changes, and the old-fashioned *olla podrida* novel has given way to a much more closely-knit affair. Perhaps some of Turgenieff's short stories are almost too much to the point. Their action is inevitable to the degree of obviousness. He never strains after originality. He is simple with the simplicity of art, the art that effaces itself to give the purity, the essence of Nature. In their kind they are unsurpassed. We prize them as Mr James has said, 'as we prize all the very best things, according to our meditative after-sense of them.' By this test we find them an unfailing source of beauty and refinement.

Turgenieff's style seems to be distinguished by preciseness and lucidity. His translators seem rarely, if ever, in doubt as to his meaning or shade of meaning. He knows what he wants to say, and he comes to the point as quickly and easily as a child. He introduces his figures with something of the facility of an experienced chess player beginning his opening, but the comparison will not go far, for he is too fine an observer to

be satisfied with an average type. His irony may keep him at a little distance from them for a time, but he soon gets to closer quarters. I don't know what his method of composition may have been but can believe that he refined from first drafts. I should be surprised to learn that he was one of the writers who 'never blotted a line.' To arrive at his quintessential style there would seem to have been an elimination of superfluities. We are inclined to ask why novels should be usually so long in view of their brief masterpieces. It has been said that he wrote up the previous histories of all the characters in his novels, though only a few of these histories find their way into his pages. It is possible, too, that he submits his characters to some analytical process to which we are not partners, for no writer is less of an analyst in public. Mr James is sometimes described as the disciple of Turgenieff (though he has told us that the master regarded his stories as hardly meat for men) and in fineness of perception and unity of effect they have much in common. Mr James, however, though some of his best and most elaborated characters are not analysed at all, has the passion for disintegration which is noticeably absent from Turgenieff who is content to describe

the actions and to record the words of his men and women. His narrative suggests a mastery over his material. He is not, like Mr Meredith, a student continually striving for a deeper and remoter meaning.

Turgenieff has little of the humour that manifests itself in a genial charity. With an intellectual perception of all the elements of humour he seems to lack the sympathetic quality which combines them. To see the reason of laughter too clearly to laugh oneself is plainly an abuse of science. His laughter is too often ironical. He is so deeply in earnest that the lapses from a reasonable sincerity which are the food of laughter are by him bitterly resented. But in essence, if not in temper, he is finely humorous. Bambaef, in 'Smoke' is a truly humorous character. His attachment to Russia has a genuine foolish pathos about it. Ragged, broken, degraded, he retains his enthusiasm: —“Look at that pair of geese,” he says, “you cannot find their equal in all Europe.” As to wit, in its current sense, I suppose that it is no disparagement of the human race to say that a writer with any pretensions to realism has not much concern with it. His dialogues are pitched in the key of nature.

Of wit, in its better meaning of fineness of apprehension, he is the notable exponent. He distinguishes with unerring delicacy the dilettante from the weak true man. His women are individualised with rare perception, and it is pleasant to know that he believes at least in the young womanhood of Russia. His girls are almost always pure and good. Lisa, Tatiana, Katia are charming, and the unhappy heroines of 'First Love' and of 'Punin and Baburin'—one of his most pathetic stories—and even the baleful beauty Irene in 'Smoke' retain at least something of our sympathy. To all oppressed, needy and unhappy folk his heart is open and we can forgive him if his good men are sometimes a little bearish, while elegant manners are the outward sign of depravity. For, on the whole, his national and social prepossessions detract in no marked degree from his sense of justice. Leschnieff and Solomine, Roudine and Neshdanof, are equal in the eyes of art, and as for such a man as Sipiagin he is seen best on the gibbet. He is too serious to be treated with an extenuating humour.

The world, then, according to Turgenieff is a miserable world, but what an interesting one. Life is a series of losses and disasters, but after

all we may bring them to a fine point. It has its brighter moments but they carry with them the seeds of decay. If he writes of the joys of youth it is a reminiscence of age. Never was our good bourgeois ideal of making things comfortable so ruthlessly disregarded. We may search his pages in vain for any equivalent to Trotty Veck, and the Cheeryble brothers would be incredible to him. It is probable that the facetious optimism which we find so good an alternative to morose dulness would be to him an impertinence. We must make allowances for differences of racial temperament. But if his books are sad they are noble. In the struggle between sense and spirit he is ever on the right side. He teaches us that duty is preemptory, that faithful work is the only condition of righteousness, that the reward of a well-spent life is a mind at peace; and if the first article in his creed is submission, the last is fortitude.

IBSEN'S SOCIAL PLAYS

IBSEN is really an interesting subject and though the cynical critic affects to be weary of him he maintains his fascination for those who have come under his influence. His social plays are a curious mixture of the trite and the strange, the obvious and the profound, combinations that may perhaps be traced to his ideality, for the idealist is more likely to be satisfied with conventional detail than the realist with whom detail is all-important.

A criticism founded upon translation is necessarily inaccurate and as this criticism refers to the English versions of a portion of his prose plays only, leaving out of account what is, perhaps, most important in his work, it can have no pretensions to completeness or finality. I don't know whether an apology is needed for presuming to criticise at all under such circum-

stances, but though a knowledge of the originals is necessary for any authoritative estimate of Ibsen's genius, it is only reasonable that the new audience to which these translations introduce him—which is, or may be, greater in numbers than his own Norwegian audience—should be permitted to record its own impressions.

Nowadays the expression of an author's temper and meaning is rightly regarded as the first duty of a translator. The current translations of Ibsen seem to have been undertaken with a proper sense of responsibility. A delightfully absurd rendering of 'A Doll's House' that was quoted some little time ago by Mr Archer, erred partly from an excess of this conscientious quality. Its bald literalness was as far from the truth as that opposite method which gained its most striking example when Hamlet's ejaculation, 'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' was spiritedly rendered into the French idiom by '*Tiens ! qu'est ce que c'est, que ça ?*' So far as may be judged from the form of the translations, and from the criticisms that have been passed upon them, Mr Archer and his fellow-workers seem to have steered a happy course between these extremes, and those of us who cannot read Ibsen's own words may at

least read him in good English, which is yet a faithful attempt to reproduce to the fullest possible extent what is essential of his form and spirit.

His types are frequently familiar ones and though he sometimes deals with the mental processes of abnormal persons rather than with the actions of typical ones there is little about them that is particularly Scandinavian. The striking point about his public life is his voluntary exile from Norway. He suffered, as other distinguished Norwegians seem to have suffered, from the want of a sufficiently wide and serious circle of appreciation, a condition almost unavoidable in a thinly populated country; but his chief quarrel was with the apathy and time-serving of the dominant classes. Whether his indignant virulence is due mainly to the special conditions of Norway or to his own temperament is a question that we need not attempt to decide. At any rate, he is one of those whose patriotism takes the form of hatred of his country's vices and scorn of its weaknesses. It seems curious that the chapter of Herr Jaeger's book which deals with 'Brand' and 'Peer Gynt' as well as with 'The League of Youth,' is headed 'Attacks on Norway.' 'The League of Youth,' as a re-

presentation of provincial politics, is probably exaggerated. It is difficult to see how such a society could hold together. As all active intelligence is directed to selfish and material ends, stupidity seems to be its only saving quality. Judged by this play alone, Ibsen would seem singularly deficient in the sense of the complexity and subtlety of the differences that distinguish individuals. His characters are somewhat commonplace abstractions. Stensgaard is completed in the first act, and so far as his personal development is concerned, can only mark time afterwards. Aslaksen, the printer, is not a man with a mind and a stomach, but a mere concoction of phrases. In its rapid changes of situation, it bears a curious resemblance to a Criterion farce. It is, however, cleverly constructed, and its dialogue abounds in effective satiric touches.

Between 'The League of Youth' and 'The Pillars of Society' is an interval of eight years. In this Ibsen attempts to show the deterioration of the moral nature of a man who has founded his life upon a lie, and its subsequent rehabilitation under the influence of a good woman. The general possibilities of such a situation may be granted; it does not need a new literary pro-

phet to proclaim them, and it may be that a hypocritical wretch who has committed, or contemplated, a variety of crimes of the baser sort, may, by a happy turn for casuistry, convince himself that he is a worthy and invaluable member of society. But for such an one there is no repentance. Consul Bernick belongs to the class of melodrama from which it should be the mission of realistic art to free us, and the play is docked of its natural tragic ending, not, to do him justice, because Ibsen has any special partiality for making things pleasant at the fall of the curtain, but because he required an opportunity for a particular kind of moralising. Of course, any other conclusion would necessitate some modification of the relations of Lona Hessel to Bernick, but this is a matter of comparatively small importance. As it is, the effect of the strongest scenes—those between Bernick and Aune—is frittered away by the subsequent accidental events which prevent their proper disastrous consequences.

It is not quite fair to compare the characters of a play with those of a novel. The novelist has many chances. Pages may miss the mark, and yet leave room for the building up of a truthful and convincing whole. The playwright

works in such a narrow space that he can afford no misses and no mistakes. He must display his figures by a few decisive strokes, and many fine touches that the novelist might employ must be discarded as impracticable or ineffective. The actors may supply much that helps to give reality and refinement, and a stage play cannot be wholly and fairly judged without having been seen. But after all allowances and abatements, I think that if we compare Consul Bernick with a character something akin in motive and circumstances, Mr Bulstrode in 'Middlemarch,' the advantage is all in favour of the Englishwoman. To my thinking all Ibsen's pictures of provincial society are strained and superficial beside the great Middlemarch collection. His satire is no match for George Eliot's humour. But pictures of society are not his forte, and perhaps we may rightly consider these two first social plays as to some extent initial and preparatory. In the next the originality of his dramatic idea overrides all plausible objections. 'A Doll's House' has some claim to rank as epoch-making in dramatic art. Its performance roused a storm of discussion that has hardly subsided, but questions of art were nearly smothered under social economics and moral problems. The motive of

the play may be briefly indicated by this passage :—

HELMER. Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

NORA. That I no longer believe. I think that before all else I am a human being—I, as much as you. At least, I will try to become one.

To me, this speech of Nora's seems good sense and sound morality, but it is not necessary to discuss it. We are concerned with the evolution of character, not with ethical problems. Nora is a charming character, uniting frivolous habits to greatness of heart in a manner original and by no means unconvincing. She lies about trifles to her husband, and is capable of continued, if ill-considered, devotion. The scene with Krogstad, in which she acknowledges her forgery, is an admirable example of the coincident development of character and situation, expressed in dialogue fresh, pointed, and natural. But when, under pressure of the necessity for the inevitable didactic issue, she suddenly discards nature and habits, and from a creature of noble instincts indeed, but of excessive frivolity and instability, becomes at once a paragon of philosophic thought, she is no longer a human being, but a moralist's puppet. It is curious that her author, who, as we shall see, assigns

excessive power to the habits derived from ancestors, should at times seem to disregard the nature created by our own habits. Miracles are a strange engraftment upon the realistic drama, but Nora's conversion is little short of miraculous. So finished and adroit is her presentation that she becomes almost possible. She has not the human nature of flesh and blood; but the life of imagination is in her. It may be said that her change though superficially sudden, has really been gradual, that the weight of her secret, her nights of lonely labour, her constant reticence, have all tended to seriousness and thoughtfulness. Yet is it possible for a woman quite uneducated, with no training to distinguish fairly right from wrong, and who has at most a partial apprehension of conflicting ideas as a moral equipment, to emerge from all her prepossessions under stress of the discovery of a husband's brutality and to become a consistent and unimpeachable professor of the extremely modern and by no means instinctive opinions that are associated with Ibsen's name. I think it would require great modifications of Nora's character to make this most interesting and suggestive play a work of real solidity. It is not necessary to assume

that Ibsen's moral aim has warped his judgment. The question whether his art is ever overpowered by his morality, or the latest advanced substitute for morality, is immaterial. If Nora and Bernick are unnatural, it matters little whether this is because they are object lessons or because they are impossible developments of dramatic motives.

Ibsen is nothing if not persistent, and as Nora contains the germ of 'The Lady from the Sea,' so Dr Rank is the prototype of Oswald in 'Ghosts.' Here, as in 'A Doll's House' and indeed in most of the social plays, Ibsen concerns himself with the ethics of marriage. It is a study of physiology and psychology in regions so remote and extraordinary that it is perhaps rash to pronounce a fluent opinion upon it. Many years before the play begins, Mrs Alving had contracted a marriage of convenience with a man of vicious habits and temper. Overcome with horror at the wickedness of her act and the falseness of her position, she leaves him to take refuge with her lover, Manders, who prevails upon her to return to what he, in common with the rest of the world, regards as the path of duty. She accepts her life of misery and deception, devoting herself to the task of hiding

her husband's character and habits from the world, and to saving their only son Oswald from his father's influence and contamination. To accomplish this the child is sent away from home, and does not return until after the death of his father, whom he regards as a man of blameless life and active charity. When the play opens, Oswald, a young man but a successful painter, has just come home from Paris to attend the ceremonial opening of an orphanage which is to be dedicated to his father's memory. In compliance with the old-fashioned superstition of the pious people of the neighbourhood the orphanage is not insured, and it is characteristic of the emphatic moral method that this circumstance must be clinched by the inevitable fire, a consequence of the prayer-meeting that marks the completion of the building. Manders, who is the representative of conventional morality, has also come to take part in the ceremony, and in his presence Oswald defends the relations of Parisian students and their mistresses. He is warmly supported by his mother to the amazement and horror of Manders, who now learns that the incident which he has regarded as the great moral victory of his life has had consequences hideously dif-

ferent from what he had supposed; that instead of sending back a repentant woman to reorganise a home, he had condemned her to a life of hypocrisy and shame, and that the pattern good man whom they have assembled to honour lived and died a hopeless profligate. His magnanimous action is branded as a crime against nature and morality by the woman he had loved and sacrificed. He learns, too, that Regina, a servant who has lived from childhood with Mrs Alving, is actually her husband's daughter, her mother, we are led to assume, having been a woman of dissolute character. Then follows the catastrophe, an effect of an unique kind. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. Oswald and Regina are victims of the inevitable principle of heredity. Training and example are lost upon her. Her parents were heartless and wanton, and heartless and wanton she must remain. Oswald's deterioration is primarily physical. In him are the ineradicable seeds of drunkenness, profligacy, and madness. They develop with startling rapidity. He has no power to struggle against his fate, his mother's cares and sacrifices are in vain, and nothing remains for him but a horrible and shameful death.

Such are some of the points of this strange drama. Ibsen has achieved at least a sensational success. It is sufficiently horrifying. But he has committed the characteristic fault of didactic writers in endeavouring to enforce a principle by extreme, extravagant, impossible instances. Oswald and Regina are not typical examples; they are horrible exceptions—not real enough to be terrible. Ibsen is called a realist. This is not realism; it is a nightmare engendered by a science primer, and a primer rather out of date. The conjunction of Oswald and Regina, with no hint that strength and virtues are hereditary too, and no recognition of the essential principle of heredity—that we are the children of our ancestors rather than of our parents—takes from its merit, if we regard it as a sermon. I remember a little book, of a kind now happily extinct, which consisted exclusively of anecdotes of little children who had trifled with the truth and had thereupon been suddenly struck dead. This extreme instance of didactic art failed of its effect upon a healthy child whose experience in real life condemned this ghastly uniformity as inherently improbable. Just so, what Mr Havelock Ellis calls the ‘robust naturalism’ of ‘Ghosts’ will rather be regarded by the man of

the world as diseased fantasy. It is true that concentration is the duty, and coincidence the necessary licence of the dramatist, and we may expect and allow much of these when they serve merely to increase the interest and smooth the progress of the play. As stage-work gives no opportunity for the gradual evolution or slow building-up of character and situation, allowance must be made for something of sharpness and suddenness in action and development. But we demand a higher degree of reality from the propagandist, who is bound to give a fair statement of his case, than from the artist, who has no concern with proofs and propositions.

It is the singular attribute of pure tragedy that it calms and satisfies the mind. No obtruding doubts or irritations mar the impression of a natural and inevitable catastrophe. But in this modern tragedy, professedly the impartial exhibition of cause and effect, we chafe under a dispensation that seems irrelevant and casual. We are shaken and appalled, but we resent the means by which we are overcome.

With all deductions, however, if such deductions are due, 'Ghosts' remains a work of extreme interest, of moral tendency, and of great, if ill-regulated, power. If Manders is a rather

superficial exponent of an orthodoxy that has a better case than he puts for it, Mrs Alving, on the other hand, is one of the strongest, most convincing, and most life-like of Ibsen's women.

It is not to be wondered at that 'Ghosts,' whether true or untrue essentially, should have met with no complacent reception. It seems, indeed, to have awakened fierce antagonism, and its author was treated as a fanatic with a grudge against the human race rather than as a saviour of society. The attacks roused Ibsen to retort upon his critics with 'An Enemy of the People,' a kind of allegorical declaration of his own position, typified by that of a hot-headed doctor, who provokes a storm of obloquy by acting in single-minded opposition to the supposed interests of the community. On its merits, it is a fresh and racy setting of an old situation. Dr Stockman, a really fine and hearty figure, is the single character of first-rate interest. Such people as Hovstad and Billing, and Aslaksen, who, as the representative of the rate-paying middle-class that Ibsen is attacking, is the most important of the secondary characters, are instances of the abuse of typical methods. They have no individual existence whatever, and consist entirely of phrases designed to show

the cowardly selfishness of their kind. They are, indeed, the simple figures that are demanded by a demonstration to which clearness and simplicity are essential. On the whole, I think that 'An Enemy of the People' may be ranked with 'The League of Youth' and 'The Pillars of Society' as one of the less important of the group, though its vigour and healthiness might tempt us to assign a higher place to it.

'The Wild Duck' seems to be something of a stumbling-block to the thorough-going of Ibsen's admirers. Mr Gosse considers it 'obscure, cynical, and distressing to the last degree,' and Mr Ellis admits that it is 'the least remarkable of Ibsen's plays of this group'—a rather curious pronouncement. It is, in fact, the grimmest of comedies, and it is so far a satire on Ibsen's own work that it seems as though it might be the outcome of that not unusual conviction of the champion of a cause that he can put his opponents' case more effectively than they can. It would be rash to declare precisely the moral intention of the play; but further than this, the charge of obscurity might as reasonably be brought against any work that does not carry in itself a creed or a personal explanation. His in-

terpreters will hardly allow us to believe that Ibsen has for once worked in the region of morals without becoming a partisan. There is no definite contention. The questions that are raised receive no answers, or else doubtful and enigmatic ones. The hunter of the social lie seems at best to be following a cold scent, and they would have him always in full cry. It seems as though the preacher might yet degenerate into a mere tragic poet. To me it seems that Ibsen is here on the right path. This play is a proof, if proof were needed, of his essential liberality—the liberality which changes its point of view, and is no less the sign of firmness of faith. Of course, it is easy to draw a complete and plausible ‘moral’ from the upshot of the play—that the claims of the ‘ideal’ are not always in season, and that when commonplace people are jogging comfortably along—ideal or no ideal—it may be as well to let them alone. This is obvious enough, but the last words of the play take us a little further :—

GREGERS : If you're right and I'm wrong, then life is not worth living.

RELLING : Oh, life would be quite tolerable after all, if only we could be rid of the confounded duns that keep pestering us in our poverty with the claims of the ideal.

GREGERS: In that case, I'm glad that my destiny is what it is.

RELLING: Excuse me; what *is* your destiny?

GREGERS: To be the thirteenth at table.

which may, I suppose, be interpreted that Gregers, who is the representative, serious or satirical, of Ibsen's views, would be a scourge if he could not be a guide. Does Ibsen, then, insist upon taking everyone seriously? I think we may give him credit for a dramatic conception, and that Gregers may be allowed to speak for himself, and not necessarily for his author. He is at any rate a warning to moral reformers to maintain delicacy of touch in dealing with sensitive subjects like Hedvig, and discretion in avoiding impossible ones like Hialmar. There is no line to divide the heroic worker from the officious meddler, and that it should be possible to ask concerning Hedvig's death—a death which, it must be remembered, saved the child from a miserable life, and was the consummation of a sublime martyrdom—is it Gregers' condemnation or his justification? is it apotheosis or catastrophe? seems rather evidence of artistic balance than of obscurity.

Ibsen's women are always better than his men, and Gina Ekdal seems to me among his most artistic achievements. There is no finer art in

these plays than the unforced contrast between the fervent, high-minded Gregers, doing the work of a busybody, and the cast-off mistress whose perceptions are too blunt to be troubled much about false positions and degraded ideals, but whose life is an example of faithfulness and self-denial. She is wholly and admirably free from sensationalism and sentimentality, and has no touch of the farcical satire, the constant use of which is a besetting fault of Ibsen's, which mars Gregers and ruins Hialmar, who is sadly overdrawn. She remains the fixed quantity among the shaking and changing of theories and theorists. When Gregers says 'Do you believe I meant all for the best, Mrs Ekdal?' she replies, 'Yes, I suppose so; but, God forgive you, all the same.' This speech, so pathetically illogical, and yet so charitable and appropriate, has more dramatic quality than countless repetitions of those stale catchwords that are such an unhappy substitute for sustained consistency of character-drawing. Ibsen's humour is often overpowered by his earnestness, but the incident of old Werle's marriage with Mrs Sørby is a telling piece of satiric humour, not the less effective because it is apparently directed against himself.

In 'Rosmersholm' and 'The Lady from the Sea,' the motive common to these plays is qualified by fine elements of romance. They have this curious feature in common that their characters are developed less by action than by retrospective explanations. Ibsen understands the function of the drama to be to supply typical subjective history and he troubles himself little about picturesque events. He never lingers with pleasure over the details of life. In 'Rosmersholm' the action, or the principal part of it, takes place before the play begins, and it could, with slight alterations, be played in a single scene. It appears to be something of a compromise between two motives and two manners. Cause and Fate have each a share in its catastrophe, realism and romance in its manner. In 'The Lady from the Sea' too, which comes as a happy relief after the gloom and horror of 'Rosmersholm,' there is the strange blending of science and fantasy which is one of the fascinations of these plays. The prosaic and the supernatural are interwoven, and it is almost too much to expect that an English audience, always so cruelly on the watch for incongruities, could ever reconcile itself to the stranger. If the play must be criticised on any-

thing like logical lines, its weakness would lie, perhaps, in the change of Ellida's mood being made absolute and unconditional. She settles down suddenly into the good housewife. Her yearning and fascination for the sea have not been rationalised or reduced to reasonable limits; they have disappeared altogether. This is not human nature, and no lesson bearing upon human nature can be enforced under such conditions, but it is best to accept Ellida as she is, and to look to 'The Forsaken Merman' as a sufficiently realistic sequel to her choice.

The discussions which raged round 'A Doll's House,' were renewed and intensified by the appearance of 'Hedda Gabler.' She is at least an interesting problem. To Mr James she is 'in short the study of an exasperated woman,' while another critic declares her to be 'an artist without a vocation,' who works in life, like Mr James's own Gabriel Nash, but without the self-consciousness of that gentleman, or like Iago, if we accept Mr Swinburne's interpretation of him as having the instinct of an 'inarticulate poet.' It seems to be like 'The Wild Duck,' a study of the reverse of the medal. If Ibsen teaches any lesson it is that we should live our lives freely and naturally. Here, with superb

candour, the principle is applied to an utterly depraved woman, who gives such scope to her peculiar individuality that we are fain to cry for a few saving conventions to cover the nakedness of such a nature. Hedda Gabler is a type of the profound frivolity which results from an aimless life and a strong will. Utterly without purpose and without interests, she has yet a great capacity for sensation. She is an egoist without self-love, and a sinner without passion. Her character is set forth with much subtlety of dialogue :

BRACK—You have never lived through anything really stimulating.

HEDDA—Anything serious, you mean ?

Thus she grasps no meaning in 'stimulating,' which implies the existence of higher interests.

She married, as she carelessly avows, because she was 'tired of dancing,' and the proposed husband was quite presentable. She is not in act unfaithful to her husband, because to be so might be inconvenient and disagreeable. Besides there is nothing so human about her as a passion. The prospects of maternity suggest to her only irritations and dangers. The round of small cares and duties that is offered to her is hopelessly inadequate to feed her hunger for

life. With some motive of jealousy in the first instance—not, as I understand it, in revenge, but rather in sheer wantonness—to admire his descent, as one throws a twig into a stream, she pushes a poor devil of a reclaimed drunkard upon the inclined plane again, and is only distressed that the manner of his death lacks something of distinction. She, herself, prefers suicide to the alternatives of a public scandal and the subjection of her will. Hedda Gabler is a personification of ennui, a daring effort of imagination, a great piece of construction, a study of essentials with all accidental human elements omitted, a work indeed not of realism, though surrounded by realistic details, but belonging rather to such ideal art as the ‘Melencolia’ of Albert Durer.

As to ‘The Master Builder,’ the last and most curious fruit of Ibsen’s genius, it is hard to resist the conviction that it shows a decline in force and coherence. It is concerned again with the oppositions of duty and will, though perhaps there is not much essential advance in thought from what is expressed or implied in the ‘Ode to Duty.’ Wordsworth would not be likely, however, to admit either Solness or Hilda as persons to whom ‘joy’ might properly

become 'its own security.' Duty, as represented by Mrs Solness, who is set up to be bowled down by the robust Hilda, is certainly an unsatisfactory matter, but should not a set of definitions be prepared for use in Ibsen's plays, including the difficult one of Duty. The Master Builder begins so far back as his duty to God, which is presently modernised into duty to humanity. Readers of Ibsen, who may choose varieties of meaning for themselves, will not be surprised to find that the last stage of development is a kind of transcendent egoism. In 'The Master Builder,' I can recognise trains of thought and patches of human nature, but no credible human being. These characters have more possibilities about them than the dull race of men. Men and women will not fit into an allegory, and this is an allegory at once wearisome and fascinating. We think we have it one day and are bewildered by it the next. Fragments that seem illuminating once, again appear like burlesque. It is a magnanimous reader who can quite believe that the appearance of subtlety is due in no measure to confusion. However this may be, there are some very hearty admirers of Ibsen who would rather see him try his hand on a

good melodrama than on such another study in the 'Higher Egoism.'

Of the characteristics common to Ibsen's plays the dialogue is generally terse and pointed, and on occasion vivid and intense. Sometimes, indeed, it reminds us of those exercises, dear to the closet politician, in which a feeble and foredoomed opponent is set up to ring the changes from confident volubility to acquiescence or collapse; but though it is not possible here to speak of particular niceties of manner, even these translations establish beyond doubt his possession of a style of which relevance and conciseness are no less characteristic than subtlety and fulness. His wit is a means rather than an end, for he condescends to no irrelevant jokes and is content to be direct without epigram. His humour is satiric and never genial; his pathos is hard and austere, never sympathetic. We are interested and stimulated, but rarely profoundly stirred or greatly exalted. In character he seems to have a difficulty in touching the mean between the commonplace and the abnormal, a difficulty inherent to the satiric method. He appears to rely more upon a fertile imagination and a power of construction than upon careful studies of men and women at first hand. Thus,

in place of displaying human beings, he tracks, with great ingenuity, human tendencies, so that his characters are oftener intricate than complex. But I must here attempt to make a distinction which is, I think, by no means an arbitrary one, between the earlier and the later social plays. Up to 'An Enemy of the People,' he appears as an aggressive social reformer. Satire is his chief weapon in the strife that he wages with a world out of joint. To him the mere artist is a fiddler in sight of burning Rome. In discussing him it is difficult to remain on the literary plane. His aim seems so persistently a moral one, that we are likely to concern ourselves more with the value in practice of his ideas than with the manner of their expression, and it is possible that he would deprecate any estimate of his work which separated these constituents. The artistic element may be the valuable one; it may be wise to concentrate attention upon it, but of the moral intention there can be no reasonable doubt. His plea is for Nature and the Individual—for a natural life or a nearer approach to it, and his mission, as he understands it, is to strike at the dogmas and conventions that at once conceal and paralyse the social state, which—

Do but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption mining all within
Infects unseen.

It is a latter-day theory that the artist writes because he must—because his ideas take form and cry for expression. But it is probable that some good as well as much bad literature has been produced at the instance of the printer's boy; it is certain that very much of the best owes its incubation to the want of money. To write with a moral object is no more forbidden to the artist than to write for wages. Each is a legitimate motive, but as we demand of the one that his wages shall never become a bribe, we demand of the other that he shall not seek to promote the cause of truth by falsehood. All we ask of the didactic writer is impartiality. He must play no tricks with Nature. If he sees that the natural evolution of character and incidents make for his thesis he has the right to display them. But such an one is rarely impartial. He insists too much upon his points, and Nature is ever chary of points. Ibsen is too often a moralist first and an artist afterwards, and moral fervour is a great, but dangerous quality. Such an order is actually less likely to promote his object if he appeals to

trained intelligences, with whom to indicate is a surer method than to persuade.

The impulses that produce such works as 'The Song of the Shirt' and 'Jenny,' at once magnificent art and of vital social influence, are not moral but human and sympathetic. Hood and Rossetti were not fettered by pre-conceived ideas that called for illustration. It was their part to express the pity and terror of their themes, not to discuss their politics. Ibsen seems to me to be deficient in sympathetic apprehension. His characters develop, not according to the laws of the universe and the tendencies of man's nature, but in the direction best fitted for the enforcement of their author's moral prepossessions. As it suits his purpose he exaggerates the power of heredity or of the individual will. He holds what may be called the Jack-in-the-Box theory of moral emotions; the more they are crushed down the more elastic and rampant is their rebound. Shake a frivolous woman and she emerges a well-equipped moral engine. Startle a hypocrite of life-long standing, and he overflows with frankness and magnanimity. They are not mere men and women to him—they are examples; and however little their

previous experiences may have suggested such an accomplishment they are astonishingly well up in his principles at a crisis. But with 'The Wild Duck' he enters upon a new phase, and henceforth these criticisms have at most a very partial application. He seems, as a critic has said, to have become 'wary,' and while his work remains moral in intention it is not so obtrusively didactic. Yet in each of the series we see a phase of the perpetual war waged between growth and limitation, between character and authority. If his unity of idea seems near akin to narrowness of vision it may be remembered that in all things, in art as in nature, there is an infinite contraction, as well as an infinite expansion. The fields laid open by the microscope are boundless as the celestial sphere. It is not enough to see life whole. The larger views must be strengthened and refined by the intense and particular view of the specialist. Ibsen has concentrated himself upon a narrow but fruitful field of thought.

He is frequently alluded to as a realist, a classification that seems surprisingly inept. The typical realist is Tolstoi, between whom and Ibsen an interesting comparison might be instituted. He too is a didactic writer, seeking

to show the folly and futility of life unless it is put into right relations to God and Nature, and to discover what these relations are. His painfully minute and exhaustive method seems almost to dispense with artistic selection. He will draw his conclusions—they may be strange and erratic—but they will be founded upon an impartial examination of all the circumstances as far as he can see them. It is as though he feared to select lest he should not select fairly. From particular experiences faithfully observed and recorded he has deduced and now preaches a philosophy of life totally irreconcilable with the current convictions and tendencies of mankind. The appalling thing about the 'Kreutzer Sonata' is its convincing reality. It is at once the triumph and the condemnation of realism, which seeks for facts rather than for truth. As a particular case, as a human 'document,' it is hideously truthful. Upon such experiences he forms his creed, as from a microscopic examination of certain details one might attempt to deduce the Creator's plan. Ibsen's method, on the other hand, is in this respect precisely opposite. He is essentially an idealist in that his work is concerned with the realising of his ideas, a more or less fixed quantity. He believes

that the development of the individual and a right regard for the scientific conditions of life are vital to the well-being of the human race, and it is the enforcement of these principles and such as these with which he is primarily concerned. Thus his own innate ideas have a large share in his characters, the details of whose constructions come rather from a store of accumulated notes than from the observation of particular persons; and while Tolstoi's men and women strike us as having been closely studied from the life, Ibsen's are usually deficient in verisimilitude. It is a significant circumstance that he continues his dramas of Norwegian character twenty years after his opportunities of study at first hand have ceased.

This imperfect criticism takes no account of the splendid dramatic poems to which most of Ibsen's countrymen and many appreciative critics agree in assigning his chief and permanent claim to consideration. Whether his work has vital interest for all time or not, and to me it seems that 'Hedda Gabler' at least is a classic, he is a striking figure in the life and literature of to-day. It is impossible to read these plays without receiving a great impression of his intellectual fearlessness and his noble

capacity for scorn of what is base and evil, and if his work as an artist is marred, and his chances of immortality are endangered by his zeal to help forward his own generation in the ways of truth and light, it is a fault, which we, for whom he labours, may forgive.

THREE PLAYS, BY MR STEVENSON AND
MR HENLEY

IF we are to have good plays it is well for our men of genius to set about producing them. They are more likely to succeed than the others, indeed, by any fine standard of success, they only can succeed. It will be an unmitigated tyranny when all the best men have the best places, and the luxuries of grumbling and denouncing are withdrawn, but we may risk this in any present encouragement of dramatic art. It was certainly one of the most original ideas ever acted upon by a man of genius, to consider that a boy's book would be a suitable form of expression for him, and Mr Stevenson has now followed up this innovation by attacking dramatic art from the side of melodrama. Maintaining the tradition that it takes two powerful men to make a melodrama, he has entered into

collaboration with Mr Henley. Such a combination must surely, one would think, prove a fruitful one. It is inconceivable that two such critics should put forth work of any but high quality. It is even more certain that they would find something to say. Creation is assured, a chastening criticism is assured. They have only to make themselves acquainted with the forms, the technique of the art, and masterpieces must ensue. How often has such reasoning proved delusive. Yet here the effect is not unworthy of its generation. If these plays are not masterpieces they are certainly work of a high excellence. Profound and original in conception they are not, but they are exquisite in workmanship and their detail is full of vigour and truth of imagination. Their characters look like familiar stock figures at first sight, but we are startled to find them alive. It would be futile and impertinent to endeavour to assign their respective shares to the two authors. Such speculative disintegration is forbidden by work of such unity and coherence. There is some room for disagreement as to the passages 'suggested for omission in representation.' Even if we were willing to spare all these, it is a dangerous custom to en-

courage, whatever precedents may be cited, that the reading and the acting versions of a play should differ.

'Deacon Brodie' is an unpretentious play. It pretends to be nothing more than a melodrama, and it retains some share of the unreality of its class, but it is a melodrama brought to a finer issue. If it is impossible and inhuman, it contains elements of truth and of humanity. Like most stage plays, it assumes that everyone is blind of one eye, and it accepts the fantasy which Mr Stevenson, if any man, could make convincing, that Dr Jekyll can withstand for long the encroachments of Mr Hyde. Deacon Brodie is the respected citizen by day, the robber and roysterer by night. Melodrama is incoherent at best; the sequence of cause and effect must not be insisted upon too rigidly. The lime light gives vivid effects, but we cannot look to it for the sweet sobriety of the light of day. To make the play a real tragedy Brodie should be a lower type, or a worse man. As it is, in his better moments, he is entirely free from the taint that a life of mean crime must inevitably bring. It is impossible to believe in Deacon Brodie, though when he says:—'I began it in the lust of life, in a hey-day of

mystery and adventure,' we recognise the tact that makes him plausible. If criticism of such work must stop short at a point, that point is yet some distance below the surface. In beauty and appropriateness of speech it more than holds its own with any of the more pretentious plays of our time.

It is probable that a general opinion would fix upon 'Beau Austin' as the most considerable of the three plays. It has at least one scene of fine dramatic interest—that between Austin and Fenwick. Austin starts from one fixed conviction; he has perfected the surface of life;—he is a gentleman. By an argument without a flaw, by an appeal of sweet reasonableness, Fenwick shows him that life goes deeper than the surface. The appeal is to Austin's own shallow ideals of generosity and good taste, but such as they are they are held sincerely and cannot be lightly dismissed. Nor can they be maintained against the hard fact of a base action :

AUSTIN. I am a gentleman. What do you ask of me?

FENWICK. To be the man she loved.

The self-sacrificing lover is one of the most familiar of stock figures, but Fenwick has little

in common with these florid heroes. He has the qualities of strength and loyalty that throw into the right relief the dilettante virtues of the Beau and give, without accentuation, the slight flavour of satire in the comedy. It will be an objection only to the dullest of realists that the characters are on a higher imaginative plane than people in real life, but it is a question whether a rake—even a well-regulated rake like Beau Austin, could maintain intact through so many years of deteriorating triumph the feelings that make effectual such an appeal as that to which he succumbs. Yet classics make their own first principles—and surely this is destined to be a classic. Its authors have too much originality to attempt to be original, but it is witty with a beautiful simplicity and directness, as witty almost as Congreve and with a far better hold on life.

The last play in the volume 'Admiral Guinea' introduces us to an old acquaintance—the formidable blind man of 'Treasure Island.' He is less terrible than he was, but dangerous still, and with a dreadful jocularly added. Many of his speeches are admirably quaint and natural, as when upon Gaunt's rejection of his overtures, in the form of an ex-

hortation to repentance, he says : ' Now I want this clear : Do I understand that you're going back on me, and you'll see me damned first ? ' Gaunt and Kit are finely indicated—the range of the play does not admit of much elaboration—and their dialogue in the first act has strong dramatic interest. They represent opposing and seemingly irreconcilable forces, but it must be admitted that their conjunction is brought about by adventures and interludes. The detail is excellent, but development depends upon accidents, not forces. Yet these adventures are spirited enough, and would be thrilling on the stage. Some of the business in the last scene should bring the house down, as when the blind man burns his hand at the candle.

If this is not work of surprising genius, it is so fresh and delicate, so sane and competent, so free from verbiage and fustian, that it gives a higher idea of the possibilities of the drama than a success of the sensational kind. Good as they are we have the impression that their authors, maintaining the high quality of their writing, might carry stronger dramatic material. A partnership which counts Mr Stevenson's imagination as an asset need fear no bankruptcy, and we would gladly give them credit for greater under-

takings. Yet they have commanded little success beyond that which is best worth having, the cordial recognition of lovers of art, and instead of being an incitement to aspiring dramatic authors they must surely act as a deterrent. Who that has a thirst for the grosser kinds of glory, and we are all human, can be less than discouraged when he reflects that a few performances of 'Beau Austin' sufficed, and that 'Admiral Guinea' never saw the footlights. He can hardly hope to do better than these, he is a bold man if he expects to do as well. Surrender is less uncomfortable when it is called compromise, and he will turn to the study of 'The Dancing Girl' and 'Sweet Lavender,' 'Diplomacy' and 'The Bauble Shop.'

THE POLITICS OF DRAMATIC ART

A LANGUISHING art may be revived either by the introduction of new methods and new matter, or by the raising of the standard of quality in the old forms. In English dramatic art to-day we have an excellent example of each kind. Mr Stevenson and Mr Henley by their failure to command anything beyond a 'literary' success have given distressing evidence of the prevalent indifference to quality, and Ibsen, who has greater virtues than novelty, has perhaps obtained a partial and unstable success rather by arousing the curiosity than by satisfying the instinct of the British public. Whether curiosity will change to interest and excitement to stimulation is a question of some importance to the playgoer who deprecates a fall into the old rut. It is not only as an artist and a moralist that Ibsen has claim upon our

consideration. He is a writer for the stage, and an innovator in theatrical matters, and it may be considered ultimately to be not the least of his accomplishments, that he has done something—perhaps very much—towards enlarging the limits of subject-matter beyond the trivial and conventional. Our dramatic art lags far behind its sister arts in almost all essentials—in subtlety, in variety, in inspiration, even in intensity. It is not the fault of the writers for the stage, but of the conditions under which they work; nor is it the fault of those who might, and do not, write for the stage, but of those conditions which they would have to accept.

The theatre is at once the most democratic and the most conservative of institutions (and may offer to politicians an example of the essential conservatism of democracy). Progress can be made only by continued slight departures from tradition. Our playwrights have to attempt the difficult compromise between their own dramatic instincts and popular theatrical taste. The result is sometimes a strange medley, scenes of insight and delicacy alternating with antiquated clap-trap and that curious concession to a striving humanity which is technically known as

comic relief. In our easy condemnation of the stage writers of the period we do not always consider it relevant to ask what would have been the effect upon the work of Mr Watts, of Mr Thorneycroft, or of Mr Swinburne—to say nothing of Mr Burne Jones or Mr Pater, if they had been compelled all along to consider the verdict of 'the man in the street'; if a necessity of their artistic existence had been a choosing of common ground, not only with the ignorant and vulgar, but with those even greater enemies of what is beautiful and good—the facetious, sensational, sentimental, and all the other varieties of distorted commonplace.

There seem to be two chances for this heavily handicapped dramatic art: the specialising of audiences, and the elevation of the general level of taste. At present the first can be exercised only in great communities and to a limited extent, as in Mr Tree's innovation at the Haymarket when Mondays were set aside for literature. Towards the second, Ibsen's plays may prove an influence of the greatest importance. What is required is to rouse the interest and intelligence of the people, who are bored by poetical plays of old types. How can this be better done than by giving them

plays which bear directly on the actual problems and conditions of life. Every man is a critic of Ibsen because every man knows that he is subject, in some degree, to the principles of heredity, and has opinions or prejudices of some kind on woman's destiny, political consistency or commercial morality. Mr Pinero's 'The Profligate' was so far of the school of Ibsen that it faced a social problem with courage and frankness. It was very sentimental and had some dreadful lapses into fatuity, but on the whole, what an advance upon the irrelevance and inconsequence of the 'Ironmasters,' the 'Captain Swifts,' the 'Sweet Lavenders' or the 'Bauble Shops.' These are the more or less pretty or effective settings of the old stale and unprofitable conventions, the eternal platitudes garnished and displayed anew.

Ibsen and those who follow in his steps have at least, as Mr Gosse says, 'such elements of life as call forth eager comment and lead to excited discussion.' Comment and discussion make the healthy atmosphere in which art thrives. Anything is better than stagnation, and whether or not we are convinced by Ibsen, we are, at any rate, set a-thinking. When the storm and ridicule have finally subsided it may be seen

that the production of his plays has done more for dramatic art than very many meritorious lashings of the dead horse of the 'poetic' drama, attempts which owe their occasional apparent success to the indomitable persistence of the English audience which never knows when it is beaten in a cause which it believes to be a good one.

At present it is principally to London that we must look for an audience to support artistic experiments. Nevertheless the politics of this subject are not confined to the Strand. The provincial audience is very much the same as the London one. It cannot, of course, concentrate so many people of exceptional taste and is, on this account, a safer indication of average taste. In regarding it we may put aside the exceptional cases that might cause us to undervalue the magnitude of the dead weight that must be lifted. Take the case of Manchester—a city by no means dormant in matters of art and which has the advantage of some highly competent dramatic criticism. Manchester usually begins the year with Christmas pantomime at each of its five theatres, and pantomime which shows signs of vigorous revival in London is undoubtedly the favourite branch of dramatic

art in the provinces. There is yet some faint remainder of an excuse for it because it permits us to share the shallow jollities of our children at the festive season. But our children do not control the quality of pantomime; the average sensual man controls it. To him we owe this conglomeration of discordant noises, garish lights, tawdry dresses, blatant coarseness, puking silliness; of singing without music, romping without merriment, laughter without mirth. Occasionally, indeed, a few good things may be seen, a few clever feats, a pretty effect, an appeal to a rough natural humour. Then for persons of refined taste there is the ballet—an honourable art fallen upon evil days, for pantomime ballets are usually inefficient and linger rather as a tradition than as an essential. Altogether, under favourable circumstances, there might be scraped together out of the wreck of a pantomime some few minutes entertainment for a vapid mind. But as for the whole performance what strikes one is the absence of daintiness, the pervading quality of coarse facetious sensualism. The appeal is not to primitive man, not to natural man, but to debauched man. The pleasures, such as they are, are well within the scope of the beery lout,

and in so far as we are pleased we approach the condition of the beery lout. It is supported by coarse people or by people at their coarsest. Its authors set to work to find the greatest common measure of the most numerous classes, and find a perverted animalism in all. Its combinations of light and colour might have the effect of awakening and enlivening an unused sense, and so possibly prove useful to a backward baby, but for children whose minds are beginning to be active it is an effective method of blunting and vulgarising.

There are some who would make the theatre a mere assistant to the parson and the school-master. Puritans still exist who utterly abhor it. For my part, if a pure minded ascetic old lady showed signs of liberality and wished to see this theatre of whose beneficent influence she had heard so much, I would rather not conduct her to the pantomime. Yet good people go, even refined people go, the respectable father of a family goes with his flock of innocents; but respectability has a glazed surface that keeps it from harm; respectability is the petrification of innocence and shares its immunities.

As the gallery and pit are crowded we may take it that the British Democracy goes, and it

is ill to argue with it. Take the members of the pit individually and their opinions are worthless, but by some process, as yet unexplained, they become infallible in combination. After all there is something human in what is equally to the taste of the man about town and the country bumpkin, and something liberal and friendly too in the recognition of a common descent from apes or to Yahoos.

All this may be condemned as a straining after the attitude of the superior person. But men lose their souls sometimes through a quite unfounded fear of becoming superior persons. The evil is recognised by most cultivated people. What is the remedy? We don't want to make things dull. It is the dulness that is complained of. We don't want to encourage a monopoly of five act tragedies. Perhaps the first practical step would be to become total abstainers from pantomime. Then we might take every opportunity of sneering at those of our friends who persist in going. Much may be done by judicious sneering. A sinner who is deaf to the trumpet calls of eloquent appeal will meekly slip into the straight path at a whisper of contempt. It may be embarrassing to have to convey to friends whom we esteem that their

tastes are low, and by implication to arrogate to ourselves the possession of finer instincts, but such qualms must be ruthlessly repressed. Presently we might have the satisfaction of hearing that a manager is ruined. As an individual he would receive our commiseration but as an instrument we should rejoice over his destruction. The ruin of a manager will not carry us very far. The substitution of an odd comic opera for a pantomime will not carry us very far. What is the remedy for the whole state of which the pantomime is the worst symptom ?

Perhaps it may be asked—Why should not dramatic art be permitted to make its own way : why should not natural selection work undisturbed ? Artificial selection is the higher development of what we call natural selection. Spartan treatment has killed many a weakly growth that carried the essential elements of strength. The arts are not practised under similiar conditions. The poet may scrape together twenty pounds to launch his volume upon an unheeding world, and posterity is the richer for it. In the intervals between pot-boilers, the painter may achieve immortality ; the sculptor, as there is no demand for his work, may as well be artistic as not ; but the playwright must have

extraordinary luck, possess unlimited means, or be a genius in practical politics to express himself at all. In other arts, the best men, so far as they work for an audience at all, assume an ideal audience; their expression is without compromise or limitation other than is imposed by the laws of art. The dramatic writer can only exist by subordinating his instincts to the taste of the average man. The machinery of play acting is on so large a scale that few individuals can afford to put it in motion and still fewer can continue to work it unless it pays immediately. Almost the whole of the best of our poetry, almost the whole of the best of our painting would have been strangled at birth, if its production had been controlled by conditions analogous to these under which the drama exists. If it is said that dramatic art is alone in this—that its healthy life depends upon popular acceptance, that it must move on simple lines, that its control by the average playgoer is a proper limitation, then I say that it is the lowest of the arts and that everyone whom we call a great dramatist is great, because he has broken the rules of his art. Such a contention is refuted by its statement. The application of such laws to the other arts would be of precisely equal reasonableness.

Some little time ago it was said that a London manager had received forty-seven plays in a single day. Making allowance for Sundays and Bank Holidays, this would be at the rate of about 14,000 a year for the one manager, which is clearly excessive. It must have been an exceptional day; perhaps it was the manager's birthday; but the number received yearly by the whole body of London managers must be enormous, and, deducting what there may be of five act tragedies by schoolboys and temperance dialogues by country spinsters and the like, there must remain a good many serious attempts by serious men. Do we see the best of the plays that are sent in, or are masterpieces even now gathering dust in pigeon-holes or wearing away in constant journeyings through the post? From the manager's point of view, his legitimate and unassailable business standpoint, no doubt we see the best of them, but it is impossible to believe that the plays that see the light are the best dramatic expression that is possible to this cultivated, earnest, and artistic age. The successful dramatist addresses himself to a low average of intelligence, a low average of taste. So, in many sorry instances, does the actor, like a barrister making his points

with a stupid jury. Our actors are almost always too emphatic. Our serious plays are overdone with emotion. Reticence is needed in writing and acting alike. These dreadful emotional speeches and moppings of the brow are intolerable as the perpetual baiting of the trap for laughter. It is not the first and only duty of the actor to widen the swing of the pendulum between laughter and tears.

That most of our actors work with a heavy hand is apparent when we compare them with what we have of exceptional refinement. For instance in 'A Pair of Spectacles' it is the superficiality of Mr Hare's acting that constitutes its profound merit. In real life some of the situations would be extremely serious, but this play is not real life and is not intended to represent it. When, therefore, Mr Hare has to depict the passion of a husband who believes his wife to be unfaithful, he shows the comic aspects only of the passion. When he finds that the letters which he took for his rival's are really his own treasured love-letters, he does not suggest big words, like remorse or pathos, but gives a touch of regretful penitence, a touch of sentiment. I admit gladly that this refined performance was widely appreciated—people are

not so stupid as they try to believe—but the excellent realism of Mr Groves' acting in the same piece, acting equal in its degree to Mr Hare's, but of a lower kind, met with even larger popular acceptance.

Art does not appeal directly to the emotions; it appeals to them through the mind. Where are we to look for this saving quality of imagination in the drama of the day? What manager will help us?

Mr Irving is such a splendid Shakespearian actor that we could wish for nothing better than to see him in the classic parts, but he has done little for the modern drama. Mr Tree has played 'Beau Austin' a few times, which is an honourable distinction, but it is but as one swallow in a very late spring. We shall hardly be saved by Mr and Mrs Kendal in a round of their favourite parts, nor even by Mr Benson's astute presentation of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' a performance which has met with considerable success in the provinces, not, if I may speak plainly, because the people who applauded it had largely the appreciation of its poetical beauties, but because in the prettiness of its scenery no less than in its execrable fooling it bore some faint resemblance to the beloved

pantomime. Shall we then look for salvation to Ibsen and his adherents and exponents who are conducting so gallant a campaign? If Ibsen is not a man of the first rank, and I am very willing to grant that he is not, because it strengthens the case enormously; if his plays, so extraordinarily interesting and absorbing except to the host of dull fanatics and the inevitable clever dissenters, are only second rate, what a dramatic outburst there will be when a man of genius works with an equal disregard of clogging conventions. But Ibsen is not respectable. The capacity for righteous indignation sharpens the scent for garbage, and the British householder in his relation to Ibsen is like the foreigner who begins the study of our language with its oaths. Of course it would be ungracious to deny that we have playwrights who do good work within the limits assigned to them.

No doubt the plays of to-day are better than these of a generation ago. But we don't get on fast enough; sometimes it seems that we don't get on at all. We want a school of farce that will ridicule what is ephemeral and eccentric in the manners of the day; a school of comedy that shall be contemporary too in manners and motive; but which shall be centred

and limited in human nature; a school of tragedy which, confining itself to no time or country for its themes, shall substitute for the mechanism of melodrama and the sentimentalities of domestic drama, the labours and crises of the soul. These are what we want, and these, in a high degree, our contemporaries could give us. What is lacking is an audience. How is it to be obtained? It cannot be formed in the near future without extraneous pecuniary aid and judicious cultivation. Desperate conditions suggest desperate remedies. There is, for instance, the Municipal Theatre. The idea is neither novel nor preposterous. By accepting the management of Picture Galleries, the various corporations have conceded every principle. The management of a municipal Art Gallery is easier than the management of a theatre, principally because its mismanagement is less apparent. If a governing body can perform a necessary function better than the individuals who are attempting it: if no injustice is done to these individuals: if the governing body does not thereby cripple itself in other directions: then no traditions or prejudices should interfere with its duty. Perhaps such weary Titans as the Manchester or Liverpool corpora-

tions would shrink from the unusual burden. But the municipal theatre should be managed by an individual with a free hand. Probably there would not be much difficulty in obtaining a competent man who would enter upon his duties with interest and even with enthusiasm. Managers do not all like rubbishy plays. Many of them would gladly take masterpieces if they could get them, and if they would pay. The municipal theatre need not pay—at any rate at first. Ultimately it might pay in many ways—even pecuniarily. It might have ten times the influence of all the picture galleries in Lancashire. It might inaugurate a new era of dramatic art. It would be a failure. Such attempts are always failures, but they are better than some successes. It might give us dull pieces, preachy pieces, pieces in which the kissing is done on the brow, which are the last things we want, but it might, by happier chances, foster our coming dramatic genius. Even better, perhaps, than a municipal venture would be the advent of a benevolent and right-minded millionaire, or even a combination of enthusiastic men of wealth. It is surprising that among all the various ‘social departures’ there has scarcely

been an attempt in England to run a theatre as a philanthropic or an artistic experiment. Rich men choose usually what they consider safer channels for their benevolent expenditure, and to 'elevate the masses,' is not, indeed, a more honourable object than to feed the poor. Yet a theatre would make a magnificent hobby, and would be a good variation from the art galleries, technical schools, public parks, and the rest.

Failing these, and rather a complement or addition than a rival to managers who are pursuing the right course, is the Independent Theatre, not the last, it may be hoped, of such experiments. Of course every attempt in this kind must meet with a large amount of opposition from interested, malignant and stupid persons, but it is depressing to find how many who cannot fairly be ranked under these heads persist in an attitude of unreasonable aversion towards all unaccustomed ideas on this subject. There are dangers to avoid of course; there must be failures, there may be *fiascos*, and the intolerance of many people who ought to know better may provoke it into attempts to startle the Philistines—the most futile of proceedings. The sense of decency in the British playgoer is a curious

study for the physiologist. Old Eccles is permitted and rejoiced in, while Oswald, in 'Ghosts' is considered disgraceful. If vice is introduced it must not be accounted for and it must be made funny. What chance has an art when its professors are met at the outset by the condition that they must not inquire too deeply and must not be too serious.

But there is another aim which no community can afford to neglect. The duty of governing bodies and of private individuals is not alone towards classes or a class, not alone to minister to the necessities of all. It is, besides, to give the individual his opportunity, to foster the genius whose triumph is also the delight and glory of the race. We cannot make a Shakespeare but we may give him scope and freedom. No sane critic considers the possibilities of the novel to be exhausted, but our stock of novels might last for a few years without additions. To the piercing eye of the artist no life is prosaic. Our modern conditions have opened out new fields for the exercise of a form more vivid and concentrated than the novel. The time is ripening for the advent of our next dramatic genius. It is for us to prepare the way.

THE END

The Essays on Mr Meredith's Novels, on Borrow, and on Ibsen, appeared originally in the Manchester Quarterly and are republished here by the courteous permission of the Editor.



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